THE DESTROYER OF SOULS:

THE RHETORIC OF FEAR

IN OLD ENGLISH

LITERATURE

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

December 2012

To Derry Lynn Tutt, 1950-1998

Derry Keith Tutt, 2010

David Thomas Tutt, 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was completed with the help of a remarkable team of individuals, including my committee member, Dr. Jacqueline Stodnick, Dr. Timothy Richardson, and Dr. Kevin Gustafson. In addition, I would like to thank the entire graduate faculty of UTA for their tremendous support and encouragement. I would also like to extend special thanks to the UTA Department of Graduate Studies for the Graduate School Dissertation Fellowship that I received for the summer of 2011. This fellowship gave me the opportunity to make substantial progress on writing this dissertation and provided me the momentum to keep up that work. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the organizers of the conferences of the South Central Modern Language Association and the Federation Rhetoric Symposium. Portions of this document were presented at these conferences over the years, and the feedback I received there has helped shaped what I present today.

Most importantly, I would like to extend my deepest love and gratitude toward my family and friends who have given me moral support through this entire process, especially to my wife, Evelyn, and our two boys, Derry and Davey. It is difficult to find the words to say exactly what your support has meant to me, so I will simply say “thank you” and “I love you.”

November 30, 2012

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores representations of fear in Old English literature and examines their rhetorical purposes. Although Anglo-Saxon writers were often unconcerned with or even hostile to the use of rhetorical techniques, I argue that Anglo-Saxons, particularly in their vernacular texts, tailor their writing to appeal to their audiences in specific ways. As such, this writing should be read as highly rhetorical. Reference to fear and fearful imagery in these texts play an important rhetorical role. Fear places the Anglo-Saxon subject in a world defined along rigid lines between Christian and Pagan, legal subject and outlaw, human and monster, recorded and forgotten, kept and lost. But at the same time as the rhetoric of fear establishes these rigid lines, the fear expressed in these texts often reflects anxiety about the stability of the traditions and practices that create them. This dissertation examines texts from a variety of genres and contexts, including homilies, saints' lives. The depictions of fear in these texts sometimes confirms, sometimes challenges, the dominant ideologies of Anglo-Saxon England. The Anglo-Saxon rhetoric of fear expresses a set of anxieties at the center of Anglo-Saxon civilization:

looking backward was the comfort of tradition marred by the threat of paganism. Looking forward was the stark possibility of an earthly future of ruin and exile. Anglo-Saxon texts turn to religious traditions in order to assuage these anxieties, but this tradition could often only answer by appealing to fear. The analysis of these texts focuses on the rhetorical attempts to balance the comfort and the terror which are found side by side whenever a speaker makes an appeal to tradition.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

ABSTRACT v

Chapter Page

1. Fear itself: a rhetorical tradition of fear in Old English literature 1

2. Hellfire and damnation: fear, invasion, and ideology in the eschatological rhetoric of Wulfstan and Ælfric 26

3. Fearing no evil: the rhetoric of fear and the delimitation of holiness in *Andreas* and *Elene* 58

4. Broken to pieces: linguistic anxiety and the rhetoric of fear in the Exeter Riddles 98

5. Alone in the wilderness: fear, antithesis, and consolation in the Old English Elegies 129

REFERENCES 185

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION 196

CHAPTER 1

FEAR ITSELF: A RHETORICAL TRADITION OF FEAR IN OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

1.1 Introduction

Readers familiar with Old English literature will likely agree that fear is a persistent theme. This is certainly true of *Beowulf*, the Old English text familiar – at least in translation – to the widest audience. The central plot of this narrative poem focuses on the titular hero's struggle against a trio of terrifying monsters. As J. R. R. Tolkien argues in his influential article "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," these monsters "are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness."[1] That these monsters make themselves known through terror is no accident: according to Michael Lapidge, "A central concern of the *Beowulf*-poet … is with human perception of the external world and with the workings of the human mind."[2] Focusing his analysis on the scant descriptions of Grendel, the specific language used to describe the monster, and the placement of these descriptions in relation to important events in the narrative, Lapidge concludes that *Beowulf* is "interested in the mechanism of fear" as a poetic technique. Much of what is memorable about the poem is due to this sensitivity to the psychology of fear.

But perhaps there is more at work here than simply artistic technique. For example, shortly after Grendel's first appearance, we are told of the Danes that

> Hwilum hie geheton æt hærgtrafum
> wigweorþunga, wordum bædon
> þæt him gastbona geoce gefremede

[1] J.R.R Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson, Ann Arbor: U of ND P, 1963. 63.
[2] Michael Lapidge, "Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror," *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr*, ed. Helen Damico and John Leyerle, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute, 1993. 373-402. Rpt. in *Beowulf: A Prose Translation*, ed. Nicholas Howe, New York: Norton, 2002, 134-53. 135.

wið þeodþreaum. Swylc wæs þeaw hyra,

hæþenra hyht; helle gemundon

in modsefan, Metod hie ne cuþon,

dæda Demend, ne wiston hie Drihten God,

ne hie huru heofena helm herian ne cuþon,

wuldres Waldend. Wa bið þæm ðe sceal

þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan

in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan,

wihte gewendan.

[At times they vowed at heathen temples, honoring idols, prayed in words that the destroyer of souls would bring about help to them against the calamity of their nation. Such was their custom, heathens' hope; thinking of hell in their minds, the Creator they knew not, the Judge of deeds, nor knew the Lord God, nor did they know how to praise heaven's Protector. Woe is to them who shall through terrible hostility thrust their soul into the fire's embrace, no hope for comfort to change in any way].[3]

In this passage, fear is shown along with its effects, as the fear of Grendel inspires the Danes to a far more fearful fate: worship practices that will doom them to eternal punishment in Hell.[4] It is not hard to imagine that the Anglo-Saxon audience of *Beowulf* would read this as a moral lesson

[3] The Old English Text of *Beowulf* is taken from Frederick Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed, Lexington: Heath, 1950, lines 175-86. Except where otherwise noted, all translations from the Old English are my own.

[4] These lines, which appear to judge the pagan Danes by the standards of Christian theology, are problematic to many critics. Tolkien, in *The Monsters in the Critics*, suggests that these lines might have been a later addition, and that the later, Christian poet might have been attempting to draw attention to the distinction between Hrothgar's troop and a more thoroughly pagan group within the Danes (101-3). Margaret Goldsmith's interpretation is closer to my own: that the lines are intended to demonstrate that the Dane's ignorance of Christianity made it easy for them to turn to idol worship (173-4).

for themselves.[5] The Anglo-Saxons faced dangers which were perhaps as threatening as Grendel is to the Danes, and the temptation to backslide from appropriate religious devotion was perhaps just as great. An Anglo-Saxon orator, looking for that elusive connection between Ingeld and Christ, could find in this passage the important message that nothing on Earth should scare a nation as much as the potential fate of their eternal souls. The fear in this text is rhetorical as well as artistic, serving as a moment for religious instruction.

A quick survey of Old English texts will turn up the same kind of rhetorical appeals to fear in the expected places: homilies describe the fearful judgments here and to come; tales of the torments of the saints teach Christians how to overcome their own everyday obstacles. But these moves may also be found in unexpected places: riddles that describe the creation of everyday objects – such as Bibles – use metaphors of torture, dismemberment, and destruction; poems that describe the fate of those exiled from the social sphere also suggest to their audience that all are exiled, alone in a hostile world, while simultaneously telling the audience to think on eternal things. How did the creators of these texts expect their audience to respond? Are they intended to instruct and move this audience? Is there, in Old English, a rhetoric of fear? Many might conclude that Anglo Saxon writers were unconcerned with or even hostile towards rhetoric, and indeed, their texts do not display much concern for the practices of traditional rhetoric.[6] However, the lack of rhetorical meta-discourse is not the same as a lack of rhetorical purposes. The Anglo-Saxons, particularly in their vernacular texts, tailor their writing to appeal to their audiences in specific ways. As such, this writing should be read as highly rhetorical. Reference

[5] See Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), especially 3-22.

[6] An overview of the paucity of rhetorical treatises in Anglo-Saxon libraries can be found in Luke N. Reinsma's article "Was Ælfric a Rhetorician," *Rhetorica* 7 (1989), 344-5. The most clearly rhetorical work written in the Anglo-Saxon period is probably Bede's *De Schematibus et Tropis* (Of the Schemes and Tropes), probably written in 701 or 702. See Gussie Hecht Tanenhaus, "Bede's *De Schematibus Et Tropis* – A Translation," in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 48 (1962), 237-53. However, as is discussed below, my emphasis in this project is not on the use or knowledge of specific classical rhetorical techniques in the Anglo-Saxon eras but rather on a rhetoric particular to the persuasive needs of Anglo-Saxon rhetors and audiences.

to fear and fearful imagery in these texts play an important rhetorical role. Fear places the Anglo-Saxon subject in a world defined along rigid lines between Christian and Pagan, legal subject and outlaw, human and monster, recorded and forgotten, kept and lost. But at the same time as the rhetoric of fear establishes these rigid lines, the fear expressed in these texts often reflects anxiety about the stability of the traditions and practices that create them.

The purpose of this study is twofold: first, I wish to examine the means of capturing and deploying fear in language employed in Anglo-Saxon England. Essentially, I wish to uncover a specifically Anglo-Saxon rhetoric of fear. Although there is little in the way of rhetorical theory written during the Anglo-Saxon period, many Anglo-Saxon texts can be read as metarhetorical in the sense that they actively explore the power of the written and spoken word, even if they do not do so specifically in pursuit of establishing a discourse about rhetoric. Texts such as the Judgment-Day homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan, the vernacular Saints' lives of the Vercelli Book, and the elegiac and enigmatic poems of the Exeter Book employ a variety of rhetorical tropes to inspire terror in the audience. The rhetorical toolbox employed in Anglo-Saxon texts has access to both the traditional techniques of rhetoric as taught and practiced in the early middle ages as well as traditions and practices that could be considered specifically Anglo-Saxon, derived from pre-Christian Germanic culture.

Second, this dissertation will examine how fear in these texts functions in the formation of Anglo-Saxon culture and subjectivity. Fear is often a means of social control, perpetuating dominant ideologies as they are practiced in religious, political, and cultural contexts. At other times, depictions of fear challenge dominant ideologies from within, exposing their inherent anxieties, contradictions, and conflicts. The ways in which these texts employ fear and terror as psychological, emotional, and religious phenomena shed light on the construction of concepts

important to Anglo-Saxon culture: the Anglo-Saxons as a people and a nation, the perpetuation of Anglo-Saxon foundational myths, the establishment and contention of hegemonic ideologies in the Anglo-Saxon period. The Anglo-Saxon rhetoric of fear expresses a set of anxieties at the center of Anglo-Saxon civilization: looking backward was the comfort of tradition marred by the threat of paganism. Looking forward was the stark possibility of an earthly future of ruin and exile. Anglo-Saxon texts turn to religious traditions in order to assuage these anxieties, but this tradition could often only answer by appealing to fear. My analysis of these texts focuses on the rhetorical attempts to balance the comfort and the terror which are found side by side whenever a speaker makes an appeal to tradition.

1.2 Methodology

In the chapters that follow, I analyze a variety of Anglo-Saxon texts, representing many different genres and contexts. Scholars face many challenges when attempting to interpret texts such as these for a contemporary audience. As John D. Niles explains, we approach Anglo-Saxon texts as "unintended readers," comparable perhaps to "persons who find themselves accidental eavesdroppers on a discussion that is already underway, between unknown numbers of unseen persons, about topics only some of which are likely to make sense to us today."[7] Furthermore, all readers of Old English texts approach them as traces of a past to which our access is constrained by the other traces of a long tradition. As Alan Frantzen explains in *Desire for Origins*, "the passage of time separates us from Anglo-Saxon culture and mediates our experience of it: thick, partially hidden, contradictory, and uneven, the layers of the past cannot readily be reduced to a single plot without loss."[8] These layers of the past, Frantzen continues, include the countless editions, translations, glosses, readings, misreading, and other cultural accretions that Old

[7] John D. Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems and the Play of the Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 1.
[8] Allen Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1990), 107.

English texts have acquired over the century.[9] Moreover, as Niles points out, scholars are often at a loss as to "what a scribal text represents in relation to its imagined exemplar – or can we be sure there was an exemplar, if the text exists in only a single anonymous copy, as is usually the case with the poetry?"[10] In other words, not even the manuscript context gets us quite to the level of the "original" – if such a thing can even be said to exist – since we cannot assume the version (or more rarely, versions) recorded in the manuscript reflects the "original" version of a poem or homily. From this perspective, Anglo-Saxon scholars might despair of ever coming to any sort of terms with their texts. Lacking any sort of certainty about a text's original form, author, audience, and without a date certain enough to provide specific cultural context, how can we ever be sure that our readings of these texts reflect anything near the readings of their original audience?

Frantzen further points out that stark dividing lines also typify Anglo-Saxon studies, a field that Frantzen sees as characterized by three closely-related oppositions: "Old English" versus "not Old English," meaning that only texts from within narrowly defined historical and linguistic parameters are given priority; "method" versus "meaning," meaning that any sort of social, political, or cultural significance of the text is less important than the methodology used to translate it; "documents" versus "culture," meaning that scholarship focuses on the text of documents to the exclusion of most other realms of Anglo-Saxon studies.[11] These dividing lines, once examined, reveal uncertain borders that can and should be transgressed, and the rhetorical readings I undertake here should do so. Rhetoric connects texts written in the Old English language to prior texts in other languages as well as traditions that continued post-1066. In rhetoric, methodology – the theory and practice of rhetoric – closely corresponds to the meaning

[9] ibid., 108.
[10] Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 2.
[11] Franzen, *Desire* 18-20.

being conveyed. And the documents of rhetoric can most profitably be studied in conjunction with the culture that produced and edited them. In other words, a rhetorical reading of these texts reveals an Anglo-Saxon subject that often transcends the traditional boundaries imposed by the modern practices of medieval studies.

This attempt to read Anglo-Saxon texts rhetorically will be heavily influenced by Aristotle's definition of his subject from *On Rhetoric*: "Let rhetoric be [defined as] an ability in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion."[12] I recognize that this reference to Aristotle is in many ways anachronistic, since the works of Aristotle were not available to the Anglo-Saxons. However, I am not arguing here that Aristotle's views necessarily influenced Anglo-Saxon views of rhetoric. Instead, I contend that Aristotle's teaching on rhetoric provides a solid foundation for rhetorical readings of texts from a variety of cultural contexts. This definition of rhetoric focuses not on self-conscious adherence to a specific set of practices but rather on persuasive moves that are appropriate to particular audiences in particular cases. To the fourth-century BCE audience Aristotle addresed, certain "means of persuasion" would be most available; to the tenth- and eleventh-century CE audience of Ælfric and Wulfstan, different means would suggest themselves. To a twenty-first-century reader such as myself, understanding a text might mean coming to terms with these terms: What, if any, is the speaker's persuasive goal? Who is the audience, and in what ways are they moved? What beliefs, assumptions, values, and ideologies may the speaker call upon to motivate his audience? Understanding these questions as much as we can will lead us to a fuller understanding of Anglo-Saxon rhetoric.

Understanding this rhetorical context will require a methodology that might broadly be referred to as "historicist," a term that could cover a great many ways of reading. Indeed, as Nicholas

[12] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, ed. and trans. by George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 36.

Howe points out in his article on the subject, since they all engage with the remnants of the past, "all works on Old English language and literature are historical in method and intent."[13] Anglo-Saxonist scholars are constantly called upon to make Anglo-Saxon history – in terms of language, politics, religion, culture – an object of study. But how does one adequately engage with a past whose evidence primarily consists of the very texts that are to be studied? As Howe explains, historicist claims face a dual-problem:

> Those who would today practice a historicist criticism in Old English studies must guard against the danger of being too certain that they know what the Anglo-Saxons thought and felt about their lives and their world. … At the same time, they must have sufficient regard for historical study to reject the facile if tempting theoretical position that categorizes any attempt to speak with some certainty about the past as an act of cultural imperialism. [14]

In other words, historicist readings acknowledge that contemporary critics can engage with the past through textual relics, while avoiding totalizing rhetoric that attempts to fit all of a culture's history into one viewpoint. To this end, contemporary historicist readings tend to emphasize "the subtle and inescapable interactions between the historical moment at which one writes as a critic and the historical moment about which one writes."[15] Critics must recognize that their own readings, like the texts they study, are historically situated.

My readings of texts in this dissertation are historicist insofar as they read Old English texts as texts that comment on and respond to the events and situations of Anglo-Saxon culture, a culture that exists uneasily at the crossroads of Germanic and Roman influences. This kind of

[13] Nicholas Howe, "Historicist Approaches," in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 79-100. 79.
[14] ibid., 85.
[15] ibid., 80.

historicism is clearly relevant to rhetorical readings of Anglo-Saxon texts, since rhetoric must always be understood as existing within a particular historical-cultural context: particular speakers addressing particular audiences, both under the influence of particular constraints. Among the most powerful of these constraints was the way in which Anglo-Saxon traditions structured their relationship with their own past: the Anglo-Saxon people were profoundly traditional. This is not to say, however, that their traditions were monolithic, uniform, unchanging. As Claire Lees explains in *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England*,

> The process by which a tradition is handed down from generation to generation is a selective one, however much it is formed and guided by past experiences, ideas, or artifacts that present themselves to the present as natural and universal. … Tradition does not mean that everything stays the same; traditions selectively reproduce the past in order to evoke an impression of sameness.[16]

The Anglo-Saxons built their traditions from diverse sources, as will be seen throughout this work: from their Germanic past, from the world of the Carolingian court, and from the Mediterranean world of Early Christianity. The traditionality of Anglo-Saxon texts, the means by which these traditions were maintained, and the mythical and historical sources of these traditions, I would argue, function as powerful rhetorical appeals, appeals to the Anglo-Saxons' sense of their present selves as constructed from their past.

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[16] Claire Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999), 28. Lees draws much of her discussion of tradition and traditionality from Raymond Williams, particularly *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977). The role of tradition in Anglo-Saxon religious writing is also discussed with a different perspective by Michael Drout, in *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century*, Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006. Drout's discussion of tradition differs substantially from that of Lees: rather than focusing on materialists-historicist readings such as those of Williams, Drout bases his discussion of tradition on theories developed by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.

Since the topic of this discussion is the rhetoric of fear, it will also be necessary to engage with the psychology of this rhetoric. Fear is among the emotions that Aristotle identifies and discusses in his *Rhetoric*, defining it as "a sort of pain or agitation derived from the imagination of a future destructive or painful evil."[17] The Danes described in *Beowulf* were clearly moved by imagination of the destructive evil wrought by the demon Grendel. They were not, however, sufficiently aware of the destructive evil that, according to the poem's narrator, they brought on their own souls through their fearful actions. Painful and destructive evils, both near at hand and far in the future, are imagined in many Old English texts. In my reading of these texts, I draw out the rhetorical purposes of such appeals to fear. It should be noted, of course, that this rhetorical definition of fear leaves many questions to be asked. As it is in *On Rhetoric*, this definition is a beginning, not an ending point for the discussion of fear as a rhetorical move. There is much still to be said about the kinds of evil an audience would find most destructive and painful, as well as their motives – psychological and ideological – for imagining such evils. Aristotle's definition of fear applies best to those most obvious threats, real and perceived, that form the locus of many rhetorical appeals to fear, such as the fear of attack from enemies in the world and judgment in the next. These types of rhetorical appeals will be closely examined, particularly in the next chapter.

But the rhetoric of fear does not always inspire terror based on clear threats and dangers. Sometimes, the fear inspired is more of a subtle, unsettling one, a sense of wrongness that inspires anxiety. This type of horror has been the subject of many psychoanalytic studies. Perhaps best known among these is Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny*. In this lengthy essay, much of it a study of E.T.A Hoffman's tale "The Sandman," Freud examines the nature and source of the feeling he identifies as "the uncanny" [German: *unheimlich*, literally "un-homely]. As Freud

[17] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 139.

points out, the term "is not always used in a clearly definable sense, and so it commonly merges with what arouses fear in general. Yet one may presume that there exists a specific affective nucleus, which justifies the use of a special conceptual term."[18] Many things might be described as "uncanny," such as automatons, doubles, or familiar things in a strange setting. Furthermore, "an uncanny effect often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what is symbolizes."[19] Many elements of Old English literature might seem uncanny in this regard to a modern audience, since these texts do not clearly distinguish between the natural and the supernatural in the way most modern texts do: the monsters in Beowulf, for example, are treated as terrifying but more or less expected parts of their own world.

Later in the twentieth century, Freud's theories were further developed by psychoanalysts such as Jacque Lacan[20] and Julia Kristeva. In *The Powers of Horror*, Kristeva takes on as her topic the concept of the abject, a particular nexus of horror, revulsion, and rejection. As she explains, "what is *abject*, … the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses."[21] The abject and the feelings it inspires call our sense of self into question while at the same time defining the stability of the self. The unexpected violence, gore, and horror in many Old English texts – such as the torments of the saints or the gruesome creation narratives of riddle objects – appeal to the audiences recognition of the abject, and in

[18] Freud, Sigmund, *The Uncanny*, trans. David Mclintock (New York: Penguin, 2003), 123.
[19] ibid., 150.
[20] A thorough discussion of the psychoanalytic concepts of Lacan is, unfortunately, outside of the scope of this current project. A good introduction to these concepts can be found in Lacan's *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1981). For the application of Lacan to cultural texts, see Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: Norton, 2007). Particularly relevant to the present topic of the rhetoric of fear is his discussion of the Lacanian concept of "lamella," 61-78.
[21] Kristeva, Julia. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP 1997). 3. Kristeva's concept of abjection is discussed more fully in later chapters.

this appeal, the border between self and other is both transgressed and confirmed. Understanding these and other aspects of psychology allows us to examine the ways in which texts engage with particular emotions and anxieties as a means of persuasion.

Another way of reading important to this present study is post-structuralism, the school of contemporary thought associated with such critics as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes, as well as with such psychoanalytic critics such as Lacan and Kristeva. As Carol Braun Pasternack explains, post-structuralist readings focus on a few key concepts: "that rather than any natural, universal, or divinely ordained set of principles, the relational structure of thought generates meaning, and that structures of thought are structured into and by the linguistic system of a culture and so can be analyzed as texts."[22] Post-structuralism challenges the reader to approach the text not as a reflection of a single tradition – such as the traditions of Germanic-Heroic poetry – but instead as a complex map of often conflicting cultural codes. Moreover, post-structuralism challenges the unity of the "text" and the certainty of the "author." These challenges to traditional ways of reading interact with the manuscript context of Old English texts in interesting ways. As mentioned earlier, most Old English texts are anonymous. While it is conventional to speak of the "poet" of an Anglo-Saxon text, it is perhaps more useful to question the role of the author in an Anglo-Saxon culture, as post-structuralist critics often do. As Pasternak points out in *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, many Old English texts

> function without authors: the poet, oral or with stylus in hand, has left the scene, a scribe has intervened, and the language of the texts conveys the imprint of tradition rather than

[22] Carol Braun Pasternack, "Post-structuralist Theories: The Subject and the Text," in *Reading Old English Texts*, 170.

> of an author. A significant, if ironic, aspect of these "traditional" rather than "authored" texts is their openness to new constructions of meaning by readers.[23]

To put it another way, a medieval text's authority had less to do with authorship than with tradition, a tradition that could be suited to various and shifting purposes. Applied to Anglo-Saxon studies, post-structuralism suggests itself as an alternative to the totalizing effect of some historicist readings. In this dissertation, I will unpack[24] the conflicting cultural codes that may be at the heart of many Old English texts. As stated above, Anglo-Saxon texts are highly traditional, representing an amalgamation of diverse traditions. I will examine the ways in which authors, readers, and texts interact with many complex traditions of their past, present, and future, traditions including Germanic paganism (and Christianity), Mediterranean Christianity (and paganism), and the rhetorical and religious traditions emerging in Continental Europe.

It is my intention that no single theory or methodology should dominate the reading of texts. I wish to engage with my texts as accurately and honestly as possible, looking for ways in which rhetors – whether or not this represents specific, named individuals – engage in rhetoric with specific audiences, both immediate and remote. The record of this rhetoric is found in the vernacular tradition of the Anglo-Saxons, a tradition which I will now examine more closely.

1.3 Rhetoric in the Anglo-Saxon Vernacular Tradition

As discussed above, the highly traditional character of Anglo-Saxon England actually was based on a complex network of interrelated traditions. This interactivity of traditions is at the heart of the Anglo-Saxon vernacular tradition, a tradition in which rhetoric played an important, albeit understated, role. As Patrick Wormald points out, no other major European vernacular literary movement dates from before the twelfth century – the conventional end-point of the

[23] Carol Braun Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1996), 12-13
[24] I find this term much more pleasing than the rather destructive sounding term "de-construct."

Anglo-Saxon period.[25] This literary movement incorporated a diverse body of texts: prose and poetry, religious and secular, literate and oral-formulaic. A variety of cultural and historical factors led to this literary flowering, but the primary influences were the traditions of the Germanic tribes from whom the Anglo-Saxons were descended and the teachings of Christian missionaries who brought Latin and Mediterranean learning to the Anglo-Saxons. As Fulk and Cain point out, these trends were blending together in sometimes unexpected ways; Germanic pagan ideas often exist side-by-side with Christian dogma in Anglo-Saxon texts.[26]

Perhaps the best known and most studied literary products of this blending are the Old English poetic texts. About 30,000 lines of poetry survive, most of it in four manuscripts: the Junius Manuscript, the Vercelli Book, the Exeter Book, and the *Beowulf* manuscript, although, as Frantzen points out, "Nearly ninety manuscripts contain some Old English verse."[27] In their manuscript context, poetic texts are written continuously, like prose, unaccompanied by titles or authors' names. That this writing is distinct from prose is clear from its distinctive use of alliteration and meter, characteristics of traditional Germanic poetry and most likely transmitted through a tradition of oral composition.[28]

The way in which Old English poetry has been written and preserved makes it difficult to analyze its cultural context. Not only are the poems anonymous, but the traditionality of the poetic form and vocabulary makes it difficult to date the poetry with any sort of certainty.[29] Of course, the historiography of Old English poetry is aided (and complicated) by the origin story

[25] Patrick Wormald, "Anglo-Saxon Society and Its Literature" in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2002), 1.
[26] R. D. Fulk and Christopher Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 2.
[27] Allen Frantzen, "The Diverse Nature of Old English Poetry," in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr. (Amsterdam: VU UP, 1994), 6. In later chapters, I will discuss two of these MSS, Vercelli and Exeter, more thoroughly.
[28] Donald Scragg, "The Nature of Old English Verse," in Godden and Lappidge, *Cambridge Companion*, 55. For a description of Old English poetic form and meter, see this same source, 58-63.
[29] ibid., 57.

related by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, in which the illiterate cowherd Cædmon is given the gift of poetry by a visionary angel. Not only did Cædmon compose, on the spot, the Hymn which bears his name and is often the first (and hopefully not the last) piece of Old English poetry a modern-day student will read; Bede reports that Cædmon went on to write poetry about

> the creation of the world, the origin of the human race, and the whole story of Genesis. He sang of Israel's exodus from Egypt, the entry into the Promised Land, and many other events of scriptural history. He sang of the Lord's Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching of the Apostles. He also made poems on the terrors of the Last Judgment, the horrible pains of Hell, and the joys of the Kingdom of Heaven. In addition to these, he composed several others on the blessing and judgments of God, by which he sought to turn his hearers from delight in wickedness and to inspire them to love and do good.[30]

Bede's account of Cædmon's poetic output makes for an interesting introduction to a discussion of the variety and purpose of Old English poetry. A survey of Old English poetry indicates that poems were indeed written on these topics and were considered worthy of recording and preservation. The fact that the list specifically mentions poems about Genesis and Exodus makes it understandable that an earlier generation of critics, bereft of any other identified and biographied poet, attempted to ascribe the content of the Junius Manuscript to Cædmon. [31] It is also worth noting that this list makes no mention of what we would think of as genre. Indeed,

[30] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Leo Sherley-Price and R. E. Latham (London: Penguin, 1990), 249-50

[31] An earlier scholarly tradition, taking Bede's account more literally, ascribed many religious poems, particularly those of the Junius Manuscript, to Caedmon himself. Such an attribution is no longer critically accepted; see Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 112. For a brief overview of the significance of Bede's account of the composition of Caedmon's Hymn, see the same, 142-3.

other than riddles and a few fragmentary *physiologus* poems, there is no clear evidence that the Anglo-Saxon poets wrote in any established genre.[32] Moreover, this list makes it clear that Bede prioritized religious poetry: it makes no mention of secular poetry, of tales of Cædmon's (presumably) Germanic, pagan past.

Modern critics of Old English poetry have not shared Bede's priorities, to say the least. Frantzen contends that these critics have arranged their perceived genres of Old English poetry into a hierarchy, topped by "the heroic" poems (e.g. *Beowulf*), followed by religious poetry such as *The Dream of the Rood*, followed by elegiac poetry, and with the bottom rounded out by "the riddles and a handful of allegorical poems noteworthy for their elaborate and somewhat enigmatic figures of speech."[33] These critical expectations complicate the reading of Old English texts almost as much as their anonymity and unclear dating does. With their emphasis on poems that reflect the Anglo-Saxons' Germanic past, they obscure the fact that, as Fulk and Cain point out, most Old English poetry is based on Latin material[34] – a fact that is most clearly evident in the two saints' lives discussed in Chapter 3.

The connection to the Germanic past, though, is not merely a critical invention: this poetry, even that most clearly based in Latinate sources, is composed using Germanic forms. The fact that these poems were written across so long a span of time employing such similar features has led some to argue that the bulk of this poetry reflects methods of oral composition employing

[32] Most of the riddles and the surviving *physiologus* poems are found in the Exeter book. These riddles will be the subject of chapter 4. Some critics believe that the elegiac poems –also, oddly enough, found in the Exeter book – constitute a self-conscious genre of poetry; this question is addressed in chapter 5.
[33] Frantzen, "Diverse Nature," 4. In an irony that Frantzen does not mention here, this final category includes the two genres, mentioned above, that the Anglo-Saxons did appear to consciously employ. It is also worth noting that, in the years since this essay was published, the field of Anglo-Saxon studies has upended this hierarchy to at least some extent, with much more work being done on previously lower-priority categories, such as elegiac and enigmatic poems, and with attempts to challenge these established categories.
[34] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 27.

the repetition of poetic formulas.[35] However, many would argue that the use of formulas does not necessarily indicate oral composition; since many of the poems clearly reflect a Latinate, literary tradition, it might be argued that the poetry preserved in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts reflects a similar tradition of literacy. In her book *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe examines the manuscript context of Old English poetry and argues that the preservation of these poems represents something more complex than can be expressed as a divide between oral-formulaic and literate composition: "the manuscript records of Old English poetry witness a particular mode of literacy, and examination of significant variants and of developing graphic cues for the presentation of verse … provide strong evidence of persisting residual orality in the reading and copying of poetry in Old English."[36] It is perhaps best to recognize that the oral and literate traditions of composition are not separate, and that Anglo-Saxons frequently used the one to comment on the other.

From the perspective of rhetorical reading, the question of oral versus literate makes little difference. The question of invention aside, it seems quite clear that much of Old English poetry has a rhetorical force: a speaker addressing an audience. This can be seen in the passage from *Beowulf* with which I began this chapter. It seems reasonable to conclude that moments of religious instruction like that, which are found throughout Old English poetry, are intended to appeal persuasively to an audience. Indeed the rhetorical force of Old English poetry was in from the beginning, as it were. The first line of Old English religious poetry delivered by the voice of the illiterate cowherd Cædmon was a call for men to praise God: "Nu sculan herigean Meotudes miltse." Bede's account of the nature and intent of this poetry is, of course, colored by his own

[35] The so-called oral-formulaic theory is advanced most notably by Francis Magoun, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Poetry," *Speculum* 28.446-67, 1953. For a more recent discussion of the topic, see Andy Orchard, "Oral Tradition," in *Reading Old English Texts*, 101-23.
[36] Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1990), 6.

rhetorical interests, but it is interesting to note that his account focuses on the poetry as rhetoric, as a means to inspire an audience to right living. Whether or not such intentions were really the intent of those composing Old English poetry, Bede's story of Caedmon suggests that there is a tradition of understanding Anglo-Saxon poetry rhetorically.[37]

The merits of Old English poetry have been much praised. But the Anglo-Saxons' accomplishments in prose are just as impressive, if not more so. By the year 1000, the time of the great vernacular preachers Ælfric and Wulfstan, the vernacular had taken on a prominent role in official public discourse. As Greenfield and Calder argue, "In many spheres of intellectual, religious, and practical life, the English, unlike their contemporaries on the Continent, chose their native tongue as the favored instrument of expression."[38] Old English prose exists from possibly as early as the seventh century – shortly after the conversion – and Old English texts continued to be recopied even after the Norman Conquest.[39] The scope of surviving Old English prose indicates that the Anglo-Saxons viewed their own language as a valuable medium for public rhetoric. According to Janet Bately, Old English was used for the dissemination of information in the fields of science, medicine, law, history, and religion. In addition, scholars and churchmen translated a wide variety of Latin texts, including doctrinal works, exotic narratives, and portions of the Bible.[40]

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[37] Some critics assert that Old English poetry was self-consciously written employing specific figures from classical rhetoric, as Jackson J. Campbell does in articles such as "Learned Rhetoric in Old English Poetry," *Modern Philology* 63.3 (1966), 189-201 and "Knowledge of Rhetorical Figures in Anglo-Saxon England," JEGP 66 (1967), 1-20. My focus, however, is less on the rhetorical form of the poetry and more on its rhetorical focus.

[38] Stanley Greenfield and Daniel Carter, *A New Critical History of English Literature* (New York: NYU Press, 1986), 38.

[39] Janet Bately, "The Nature of Old English Prose" in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 71. For an exhaustive listing of prose works written in Old English, see Karen Quinn and Kenneth Quinn, *A Manual of Old English Prose*, Garland: New York, 1990. The catalogue includes categories such as "Liturgical Texts," "Medical Texts," and "Folklore," but does not appear to contain any texts that deal specifically with rhetoric.

[40] ibid., 71

The largest single contribution to the Old English vernacular prose tradition came from King Alfred the Great (871-99), who launched a massive campaign of Latin and vernacular literacy after securing his kingdom against the Vikings who had ravaged much of Britain. Fulk and Cain point out that it is impossible to judge the success of Alfred's program. But clearly program of vernacular translation launched by Alfred "had the consequence of dignifying the vernacular, legitimizing English as a language of scholarship, which it had never been before."[41] Alfred himself is believed to have translated four major works: Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, to which Alfred appended his own lengthy preface; Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*; the *Soliloquies* of Augustine; and portions of the Paris Psalter.[42] The Alfredian corpus is important not just because of its impact on the prominence of Old English as a language, but for its revitalization of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The Viking invasions starting in the late eight century had irreparably harmed the achievements in Anglo-Latin learning reached by English churchmen. According to Fulk and Cain, Alfred's translations seem primarily focused on rebuilding and recapturing some of this lost learning.[43] As will be discussed later, this became a particular point of emphasis for Ælfric and Wulfstan, who saw the protection of monastic life as vital to the preservation of a stable English state.

While many of these prose works could be viewed as rhetorical, the ones that interact the most directly with the rhetoric of fear are the homiletic texts. Old English homilies make up a substantial portion of the extant vernacular prose corpus, consisting of about 250 extant homiletic texts.[44]The authors of these texts shared a common faith (Catholic Christianity), many of the same theological concerns (orthodoxy, the fate of the soul after death, the roles of secular

[41] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 22-3.
[42] ibid., 50.
[43] ibid., 69.
[44] ibid., 71.

and monastic clergy), a tradition of Latin texts (gleaned from continental homiliaries), and a common language (Old English). But beyond this, it is counterproductive to generalize about this body of texts. Even the term "homily" is something of a term of convenience. As Fulk and Cain point out, homilies should appropriately be distinguished from sermons:

> the former are exegetical, comprising expositions of the daily pericope (lection from Scripture, in Latin), the latter catechetical or hortatory, comprising moral instruction of a more general nature, treating of doctrine or nonscriptural narrative, exhorting the congregation to right behavior, or explaining the liturgy and its significance.[45]

These terms are frequently used interchangeably, most notably in Benjamin Thorpe's translation of Ælfric's *Sermones Catholoci* as *Catholic Homilies*. According to Milton Gatch, this represents an unfortunate confusion, since Ælfric himself seems to have resisted using the term "homily" to describe his own writing.[46] However, works of both kinds are intermixed in manuscripts, along with some generally homiletic saints' legends. This kind of intermingling, along with the large number of mostly anonymous "composite" homilies which recombine material from earlier works into new compositions, makes it difficult to assert a definite number for the corpus.[47] Although these texts are quite diverse, they are all rooted in the continental traditions of the medieval Christian church. As early as the fifth or sixth centuries, liturgical texts of various types were being collected in homiliaries. These earliest collections seem to have been intended for private, devotional use as opposed to use as a source for preaching material.[48] The most influential continental homiliary was that of Paul the Deacon (d. ca. 799), who was commissioned by Charlemagne to compile patristic readings, with the goal of standardizing the

[45] ibid., 70.
[46] Milton McC. Gatch, "The Achievement of Ælfric and his Colleagues in European Perspective," in *The Old English Homily and its Backgrounds*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Bernard F. Huppé (Albany, SUNY Press, 1978), 45.
[47] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 71.
[48] Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 27.

monastic night office.[49] According to Smetana, Paul's collection compiled selections from the best-known exegetes of the European church, including Bede, Maximus, Leo the Great, and Pope Gregory.[50]

Many of these homilies are attributed to two churchmen of the late-tenth/early-eleventh centuries, Aelfric of Eynsham and his student Wulfstan; their careers and works are discussed extensively in the next chapter. The remaining homilies are all anonymous, many of them found in two collections, known as the *Blickling* and the *Vercelli Homilies*. The *Blickling Homilies* are found in a single manuscript that once resided in Blickling Hall, Norfolk, and consist of nineteen works, one of them fragmentary. The twenty three *Vercelli Homilies* are found in the *Vercelli Book*, which also includes religious poetry such as *Elene*, *Andreas*, and *The Dream of the Rood*. Neither of these earlier collections can be dated with any certainty, although both manuscripts date from around the year 1000. These homilies were written, according to Gatch, "at least a generation earlier than Ælfric's earliest publication of his work around 990."[51] Their origins may actually go back much further; Stanley Greenfield and Daniel Calder suggest that their vernacular antecedents could have existed before the late ninth century.[52] However, as Fulk and Cain point out, it is impossible to prove any of them were written before the mid-tenth century.[53] This generation gap is significant: as discussed below, it encompasses the full flowering of monastic reform, perhaps a significant factor in key differences between the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan and those of the earlier collections.

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[49] Cyril L. Smetana, "Paul the Deacon's Patristic Anthology," in *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1978), 76.
[50] ibid., 80-1
[51] Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 8.
[52] Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 72.
[53] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 72.

The so-called Benedictine reform movement was perhaps even more influential on the development of the later Old English homilies than was the Alfredian program of translation. Although Alfred never successfully revived monastic life in England, several religious authorities in the later tenth century – most notably Dunstan, Oswald, and Æthelwold – succeeded in bringing this continental movement of monastic reform to England. This movement set out to regularize monastic practices in accordance with the *Rule* of St. Benedict. According to Gatch, the English manifestation of this reform movement stressed the importance of educational work and devotion to the king as the primary secular support for the monastic system.[54] If Alfred's educational program helped to shape the vernacular prose tradition of which the Old English homilies are a part, the monastic reform movement of the tenth century created the religious infrastructure for the writing and dissemination of homiletic texts. Gatch suggests that the homiletic nature of so much late Anglo-Saxon prose is due to the influence of monastic reform, which emphasized biblical explication and standardization of the liturgy.[55] Of the Old English homilies, those of Ælfric and Wulfstan are most clearly influenced by the reform movement, as both homilists were products of the reform movement at its zenith. It is most likely that the success of monastic reform accounts for the notable differences – discussed in chapter 2 – between the homilies of Ælfric and Wulfstan and those of *Blickling* and *Vercelli*. According to Gatch, tenth-century monastic reform is "the theological watershed which lies between the work of the earlier, anonymous Old English homilies and that of Ælfric and Wulfstan."[56] The anonymous works, although traditional in the sense that they reflect the traditions of continental homilaries, did not have the vast resource of monastic traditions codified in the Benedictine reform and reflected in the writings of Ælfric and Wulfstan. This codification of tradition

[54] Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 9-10. See also Michael Drout, *How Tradition Works*, particularly chapter 3.
[55] ibid., 11.
[56] ibid., 8.

provides important rhetorical topoi for the rhetoric of the later homilists, as will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

1.4 Chapter Overview

Now that I have laid out the basic foundations of my argument, the remainder of this work will proceed in four parts, each examining the expressions of fear in a different set of texts. In Chapter 2, "Hellfire and Damnation: Fear, Invasion, and Ideology in the Apocalyptic Rhetoric of Wulfstan and Ælfric," I examine one of the most obvious sources of the rhetoric of fear in Anglo-Saxon literature: the eschatology of vernacular homilists. Writing in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, Wulfstan and Ælfric composed many powerful statements about judgment and the end times. Drawing on both the Anglo-Saxon vernacular prose tradition discussed above and the solidly traditional theology of Carolingian Europe, these two homilists employ rhetoric that often makes use of diverse eschatological topoi, bringing together judgment and punishment both in the future (during the Day of Judgment) and in the present (during foreign invasion and domestic turmoil). Understanding the full impact of this rhetoric, I argue, requires an understanding of the connections Ælfric and Wulfstan ask their audience to make.

In Chapter 3, "Fearing no Evil: The Rhetoric of Fear and the Delimitation of Holiness," I turn from vernacular prose homilies to the closely related genre of vernacular poetic hagiography. The genre of hagiography – the written accounts of venerated persons' lives, missions, and (frequently gruesome) deaths – often dwells on fearful topics in ways that might seem bizarre to modern readers. This is certainly the case with the two poems I will focus on, *Andreas* and *Elene*. I argue that both texts are probably intended to be read rhetorically, as models for holiness. Both texts show their audience examples of holiness that are made all the more clear through their antithesis in the form of abject wickedness. In many places, this

antithesis is shown through the rhetoric of fear: the holy and the damned must each withstand and employ the rhetoric of fear; how they use and respond to this rhetoric helps define in which group they belong.

Chapter 4, "Broken to Pieces: Linguistic Anxiety and the Rhetoric of Fear in the Exeter Riddles" examines texts that may at first appear not too concerned with the rhetoric of fear: the ninety or so riddles found in the Exeter Book. Although many of these riddles are playful, even obscene, in tone, many describe their hidden objects in terms of fearful rhetoric, with images of torture and destruction. In this chapter, I argue that this rhetoric of fear is itself used as a riddling device, concealing and revealing the riddle object. In particular, I will focus on several riddles that use imagery of torture and destruction to describe subjects related to literary production, such as the ones describing inkhorns (88[57] and 93), pens (51 and 60), Gospel Book (26) and bookworm (47). The fates of the objects described therein and the fearful rhetoric used to mask them reflect Anglo-Saxon anxieties about literacy, language, and memory.

Finally, in Chapter 5, "Alone in the Wilderness: Fear, Antithesis, and Consolation in the Old English Elegies," I turn my attention to the Exeter-Book lyrics frequently called elegies. While recognizing this category as problematic, I contend that many of these poems address similar themes and employ similar rhetoric. In particular, many of them share a focus on the antithesis of, on the one hand, despair for the transience of the world and, on the other, the consolation of eternity. The rhetoric of fear in these poems often employs powerful contrasts: transience and permanence, community and exile, nature and civilization. Although most of the texts attempt to focus their rhetoric on the hope of eternity, the tension between that hope and the anxiety always present in this transient life is never fully resolved.

[57] According to the numbering in the Krapp-Dobbie edition of the Exeter Book; the controversy of numbering the riddles is discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

There are complex connections between and among Anglo-Saxon readers, authors, and texts form a fascinating web of ideas, beliefs, traditions, and practices. In my reading of these texts, I look for the rhetorical moves that are broadcast across this web, specifically those moves related to anxiety, terror, and fear. What the Anglo-Saxons were frightened of – or at least what their rhetors expected them to be frightened of – tells us a great deal about how Anglo-Saxons viewed themselves and their world around them. It is perhaps not too great a stretch to point out that our own age is not so different: we are interconnected through a complex web, and the rhetoric coming across that web is often driven by fear. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear meta-rhetorical discourse describing fear-based rhetoric – particularly when it is religious rhetoric – as "dark ages" or "medieval." This is a comparison that I view as both appropriate and unfortunate. It is appropriate because the rhetoric of fear does draw on topoi important to the Middle Ages, but unfortunate insofar as it contributes to the othering of the medieval. Used in this way, the Middle Ages can serve as sort of a dumping ground for all that we find inappropriate to our (post-)modern world. But the rhetoric of fear in our own day and age is our own rhetoric of fear, and its "medievalness" is our own as well. To put it another way, the modern and post-modern may sometimes be surprisingly medieval. By the same token, much of the medieval world need not be so alien to modern ears and eyes: much of it may indeed be more post-modern than the post-modern era. This dissertation is not about the present day or about contemporary rhetoric, but the way we engage with and respond to contemporary rhetoric, particularly rhetoric that asks us to be afraid, is of great importance to me. The ways in which the rhetoric of fear in Old English literature is like and unlike our own may be of great value to the way we think about our own often fearful world.

CHAPTER 2

HELLFIRE AND DAMNATION: FEAR, INVASION, AND IDEOLOGY IN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL RHETORIC OF ÆLFRIC AND WULFSTAN

2.1 Apocalypse, Eschatology, Invasion

As discussed in the previous chapter, Old English homilies are profoundly rhetorical. With the goal of inspiring their audience to live good Christian lives, homilists employed a variety of rhetorical practices, including appeals to fear, identified by Aristotle as "a sort of pain or agitation derived from the imagination of a future destructive or painful evil."[1] For Anglo-Saxon Christians, the most destructive and painful future they could imagine would be the apocalypse. The Old English homilies frequently reference various themes and images related to the end of this world.[2] Archbishop Wulfstan, an important figure in 11th century Anglo-Saxon religion and politics, begins his most famous work with a dire warning: "Leofan men, gecnawað þæt soð is: ðeos woruld is on ofste, and hit nealæð þam end, and hit is on worolde aa swa leng swa wyrse" [Beloved men, know what is true: this world is in haste, and it nears the end, and thus it is in the world ever worse and worse].[3] This work, usually referred to by its brief title as "Sermo Lupi ad Anglos" or "Sermon of the Wolf to the English," places the troubles faced by the English in the context of divine wrath and the end times. A few decades earlier, the prolific homilist Ælfric, Wulfstan's chief influence, prefaced his first collection of Catholic Homilies with similar warnings, explaining that he was translating Latin scripture into English "for ðan ðe

[1] Aristotle, *On* Rhetoric, 139

[2] See Robert DiNapoli, *An Index of Theme and Image to the Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: Comprising the Homilies of Ælfric, Wulfstan, and the Blickling and Vercelli Codices*, (Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1995). DiNapoli's *Index* includes three categorizations that fall under the general rubric of "apocalyptic: "Anti-Christ", "The Day of Judgment", and "The Last Days."

[3] Bethurum, Dorothy, ed. *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), 267. The text is taken from Homily XX, the longest version of *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos*. Hereafter, quotations from Wulfstan's homilies are cited in text by Behurum's numbering and line numbers. Except as otherwise noted, all translations from Old English are my own.

men behofiað godre lare swiðost on þisum timan, þe is geendung þyssere worulde [because men need good law most of all in this time which is the ending of this world]". For Ælfric, the impending apocalypse is the exigence for a campaign of vernacular education: he explains that "Gehwa mæg þe eaðelicor þa toweardan costnunge acumen, ðurh Godes fultum, gif he bið þurh boclice lare getrymmed" [Everyone may more easily endure the impending tribulation through God's help if he is strengthened by biblical doctrine].[4] These examples are among many rhetorical moves made by Ælfric and Wulfstan to place their message in the context of the threat of apocalypse and God's judgment. The homilists present the end times and accompanying judgment as a future event to be feared, but also something immediate and threatening, an event demanding their audiences' attention.

Outside of the church and the monastery, however, many contemporaries of Ælfric and Wulfstan had to face a destructive and painful evil in the present, one just as threatening and immediate as the apocalypse, in the forms of severe Viking raids that renewed and worsened around the late 10th/early 11th century, during the political turmoil following the death of King Edward and the ineffectual reign of his half-brother Æthelred, called Unræd ("No-Counsel").[5] Beginning with coastal raids in the 980s, the Danes, under King Swein, ultimately launched a full-scale invasion of England in 997. By 1014, Swein had deposed Æthelred and declared himself King; by the end of 1016, his son Cnut sat on the throne.[6] These events coincided with the careers of Ælfric and Wulfstan, both of whom commented on and, to a certain extent, participated in them. In their writings, Ælfric and Wulfstan did not always concern themselves

[4] Jonathan Wilcox, ed. *Ælfric's Prefaces* (Durham, Durham Medieval Texts, 1994), 108. (Hereafter cited in text by line number).
[5] The name is often mistranslated into modern English as "Ethelred the Unready." The epithet, which plays on the literal meaning of his given name, "Noble Counsel," was intended to highlight the poor decisions made by the king in times of great crises. See F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Calrendon, 1950), 89.
[6] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 370-87.

with references to contemporary events – for example, according to DiNapoli, Vikings are explicitly referenced in three homilies by Ælfric and two by Wulfstan.[7] Still, an invading heathen horde can be an inspiring topos in a rhetoric that makes connections between a nation's sins, disastrous events, and the apocalypse. It is easy to imagine that Anglo-Saxon Christians would see apocalyptic signs reflected in the warfare and political instability brought by the Danish invaders. Indeed, the Gospel of Matthew lists as a sign of the end times that "nation will rise against nation; and kingdom against kingdom." (24:7) In his homily *Secundum Lucam*, Wulfstan interprets this verse as describing invasions of his own day, without naming the Vikings specifically: "And ðy us deriað and ðearle dyrfað fela ungelimpa, and ælþeodige men and utancumene swyðe us swencað, ealswa Crist on his godspelle swutollice sæde þæt scolde geweorðan" [And thus many misfortunes harm and severely injure us, and foreign men and strangers severely trouble us, just as Christ in his Gospel clearly said should happen]. (III.21) Whether or not the Vikings and their harassment of the English are specifically mentioned, the threat of invasion and conquest by foreign enemies adds a layer of fear to the apocalyptic rhetoric of Ælfric and Wulfstan. As Malcolm Godden discusses in his article "Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England," Ælfric and Wulfstan wrote many homilies that attempt to address "the moral and theological problems posed by successful invasion, and particularly invasion of a sophisticated Christian civilization by heathen barbarians,"[8] a subject which was complicated by the eschatological expectation of Christian faith. The complication, as explained by Godden, involves the distinction between divine punishment and the signs of the end times. Simply put, if the Vikings are sent as punishment, punishment that might be alleviated through

[7] DiNapoli, *Index of Theme and Image*, 81

[8]Malcolm Godden, "Appocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England," in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray, and Terry Hoad (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 130.

atonement, this sets them apart from the inevitable, unavoidable suffering that would accompany the apocalypse. In this chapter, I expand on Godden's discussion, examining the ways Wulfstan and Ælfric use the rhetoric of fear to articulate concepts of transgression, judgment, and punishment, both in their present day and in days to come. This type of rhetoric falls under the rubric of eschatology, which Gatch identifies with "the entire range of ideas dealing with the destiny of mankind: reflections on death and on man's destiny thereafter up to and including the events of the apocalypse and Last Judgment."[9] As my reading of the texts shows, Ælfric and Wulfstan frequently conflate and combine various eschatological topoi: judgment, the division of good and evil, punishment, and possible atonement. In the rhetoric of Ælfric and Wulfstan, these are applied to individuals and nations as a whole, occurring both in the present day and in days to come. These topoi, drawn from authoritative sources as part of an overall rhetoric of fear, provide the rhetorical force for many of Ælfric and Wulfstan's homilies. It is difficult to say whether an eleventh-century audience would have accepted or rejected the connections made by Ælfric and Wulfstan. However, it seems clear that the homilists sincerely believed in their own doctrine. It also stands to reason that they expected their rhetoric to appeal to an audience that shared these beliefs and could be motivated by the fear they inspired.

My primary focus in this chapter will be two homilies, Ælfric's *Sermo ad Populum* and Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*. The former, written by Ælfric for the octave of Pentecost, is edited as number 11 in John C. Pope's *Supplementary Collection* of homilies not collected in Ælfric's Lives of Saints or either series of Catholic Homilies.[10] According to Milton Gatch, this is "Aelfric's most complete eschatological statement."[11] The latter, Wulfstan's best-known

[9] Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 63.
[10] John C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols. (EETS: London, 1967), 407-52. Quotations from this homily will be cited in text by line number; the translations are my own.
[11] ibid., 100

eschatological work, is also the work which most explicitly deals with the issue of Viking invasions. The full Latin title of the work translates to "The Sermon of The Wolf to the English, when the Danes were persecuting them most, which was in the year 1014 from the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ," a title which might be seen as placing the English people and their trials in the context of a spiritual timeline, one with a clear beginning – the incarnation – and a clear ending, the coming of Antichrist.[12] Before I turn to a specific reading, however, it will be necessary to examine the theological and cultural context of Ælfric and Wulfstan's rhetoric.

2.2 Ælfric and Wulfstan

As discussed previously, Ælfric and Wulfstan are responsible for a substantial portion of the extant vernacular homilies, and are indeed the only named authors of vernacular homilies. Most of Ælfric's homilies were published in three collections: two series of *Catholic Homilies* and a set of hagiographic homilies, *The Lives of Saints*. According to Godden, both series of the *Catholic Homilies*, his earliest works made available in manuscript form, were published early in the last decade of the tenth century.[13] Each of these contains 40 homilies, arranged according to the liturgical calendar. After completing these sets, Ælfric compiled a set of homilies on the lives of saints, published, according to Peter Clemoes, sometime between 992-1002.[14] Ælfric continued to work on these and other homilies throughout his life, still revising some of the *Catholic Homilies* after his promotion to abbot of Eynsham in 1005.[15] The canon of Old English homilies by Wulfstan is much less defined, since he did not refer to himself by name, signing his

[12] Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 13.
[13] Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary* (Oxford: EETS 2000), xxxii.
[14] Peter Clemoes, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works," in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul Szarmach and Deborah Oosterhouse (New York: Garland, 2000), 56.
[15] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 81.

works – if at all -- with the Latin pseudonym "Lupus."[16] Twenty-one texts are ascribed to him, although the true number may be higher and many of those texts exist in multiple versions. Unlike Ælfric, Wulfstan did not publish his homilies in any defined set or series, suggesting that his sermons were intended for any occasion.[17]

As discussed in the previous chapter, all of the vernacular homilies are based to some extent on the homiliaries compiled in Continental Europe primarily in the Carolingian period. It is widely recognized that Paul the Deacon's collection of patristic authorities was profoundly influential on Ælfric's selection of sources for his homilies. It is important to note that Paul the Deacon's work focused not on composing but rather collecting material from authoritative sources. Unlike earlier homilists, Ælfric was an innovator in his handling of sources. As Gatch points out, Ælfric supplemented the material he gleaned from standard continental homiliaries with other relevant materials from his own collection and memory.[18] Wulfstan's writing shows similar innovation in his handling of sources. Like Ælfric, Wulfstan draws many of his homilies from Carolingian and Patristic sources. In addition, Wulfstan revised some texts written by Ælfric, such as *De falsis diis*, or "Of The False Gods."[19] According to Fulk and Cain, Wulfstan reworks his predecessor's oration to fit his own rhetorical purposes and style, adding his "characteristic binomials and intensifiers" and omitting some details he apparently found indecorous, such as the incest between Venus and Jove or Saturn's devouring of his children.[20]

Ælfric and his fellow Anglo-Saxon homilists also differed from the continental tradition in their commitment to the vernacular. In his contribution to *The Old English Homily and its*

[16] Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, 24. See also Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 16 for a discussion of possible special significance of this name in the context of *Sermo Lupi*.
[17] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 82.
[18] Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 16.
[19] Wulfstan's homily is edited as number XII in Bethurum, 221-4. Ælfric's homily of the same name is edited in Pope as XXI, 1967-8.
[20] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English Literature*, 85.

Background, Gatch explores evidence for the use of the vernacular in the continental church before Ælfric. At the end of his impressive survey of the available material, he provisionally concludes that "There is no evidence which allows one to suppose that preaching texts in the vernacular – whether homilies or sermons – were produced in any language in a volume comparable to that in Old English before the end of the eleventh century."[21] The Christian Church of the Middle Ages was often resistant to the liturgical use of the vernacular; according to Gatch, "the matter of regular Sunday preaching in the dialect intelligible to the people seems not to have been considered a normal *desideratum* until the Carolingian era."[22] By the ninth century, the Council of Tours did recognize the need for bishops to make material available to the people in the vernacular; however, there was no call for liturgical texts to actually be written down in any language other than Latin.[23] Presumably, multi-lingual preachers were expected to extemporize translations from the patristic authorities collected in the homiliaries. As discussed in the preceding chapter, however, the vernacular prose tradition in Anglo-Saxon England was unmatched anywhere else in early Medieval Europe: it makes sense that Ælfric and Wulfstan would participate in and add to this rich tradition. Evidence from Ælfric's writing suggests that he, at least, was familiar with – if not always approving of – earlier vernacular prose texts. As he explains in his preface to his first series, he undertook his tasks primarily "for ðan ðe ic geseah and gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum Engliscum bocum, ðe ungelærede men ðurh heor bilewitnysse to micclum wisdom tealdon" [because I saw and heard much error in many English books which unlearned men through their simplicity too greatly esteemed].[24] On the other hand, in the same preface he has much good to say about "þam bocum ðe Ælfred cyning snoterlice

[21] Gatch, "Achievement," 60.
[22] ibid., 47.
[23] ibid., 48.
[24] Wilcox, ed. *Ælfric's Prefaces*, 108.

awende of Ledene on Englisc" [the books which King Alfred wisely translated (literally "turned") from Latin into English].[25]According to Godden, the books Ælfric most likely had in mind were the Old English version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (not actually translated by Alfred, but often attributed to him), Gregory's *Pastoral Care* and *Dialogues*, and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.[26]

What distinguished good and bad English for Ælfric? As is often the case in medieval theology, it is a question of authority. As discussed in the previous chapter, the traditionality of Anglo-Saxon texts played an important cultural and rhetorical role. While simultaneously appealing to their Anglo-Saxon audiences, the vernacular homilists were bound up in the traditions of early medieval homiletics and the continuing effects of the institution of Benedictine reform in England. As innovative they were in their combining of sources, their development of unique rhetorical styles, and their commitment to producing preaching texts to the vernacular, Ælfric and Wulfstan were fully consistent with continental homilists' concern for the orthodoxy of their sources' teachings. This concern with orthodoxy reflects the rhetorical priorities of the early medieval church. As Gatch points out, "If a single word were to be chosen to characterize early medieval theology, it would probably have to be *conservative.*"[27] That is to say, theological questions seem to have been primarily settled by reference to authoritative texts rather than through metaphysical speculation. Paul the Deacon's mission was to provide preachers and theologians with appropriate, authoritative material. Ælfric's stated goals for the *Catholic Homilies* are consistent with this approach. He found rhetorical exigence in the "gedwyld on mannegum Engliscum bocum," suggesting that he was skeptical of the value of

[25] Wilcox, *The Prefaces of Ælfric*, 108.
[26] Malcolm Godden, "Ælfric and the Vernacular Prose Tradition," in *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1978), 103-4.
[27] Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 4, emphasis in the original.

homilies – like those collected in the *Blickling* and *Vercelli* collections – which referred to sources of dubious authority. Ælfric, like Paul the Deacon, believed in providing the laity with material of unimpeachable authority, and he did so by drawing on material originally collected by Paul and other continental homilists. Wulfstan was similarly committed to conservative exegetical and homiletic practices, as evidenced by the sources he consistently references. According to Gatch,

> for theological concepts he turned to Ælfric and to Adso of Montier-en-Der, Abbo of St-Germain-des-Pres, and Pirmin of Reichenau; for moral and legal injunctions he relied on the Carolingian canonists and reformers; for his exhortations to clerical teachers, he was indebted to the Old Testament prophets as interpreted in the patristic tradition.[28]

Although Wulfstan was less rigorous than his Anglo-Saxon mentor Ælfric in actually citing his sources, he seems to have been just as careful in selecting sources that were viewed by his contemporaries as valid and authentic. [29]

The effects of the Benedictine Reform movement on the writing of Ælfric and Wulfstan are complex. As discussed in the previous chapter, this movement, beginning in the mid-tenth century, emphasized codification of the rules for monastic living. This would include such things as preaching and teaching, with a particular emphasis on training clergy, both monastic and regular. There is not, however, any evidence of a vernacular emphasis: as Lees points out, the primary documents of reform are all in Latin, and "preaching in English is not institutionalized by this phase of the reform."[30] The Blickling and Vercelli collections, marred as they are by "gedwyld," are the primary witness to the role of vernacular preaching in tenth-century England. But this Latinity would make the reform very self-limiting. According to Lees, Ælfric's

[28] Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 19.
[29] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English*, 85.
[30] Lees, *Tradition and Belief*, 90.

vernacularity brought the Benedictine reform to the world beyond the cloister: "Not content with the Latin reform of the liturgy, Ælfric takes the necessary next step of structuring English preaching according to the intellectual and theological principles of the reform, though in English and not in Latin."[31] Ælfric, and by extension Wulfstan, may not, then be in the same category as early reformers like Dunstan and Æthelwold, but the mission they carry out is an extension of the goals of reform in general.

It is even more difficult to say what relationship there was between the late tenth/early eleventh century homilies and any sort of Anglo-Saxon rhetorical tradition. As Bethurum points out, the time of Ælfric and Wulfstan lies between two ages of rhetorical scholarship that are more fully understood by modern scholars: the juridical arts of the Carolingian period and the hermeneutical rhetoric of the twelfth century.[32] Many scholars, though, have seen Ælfric and Wulfstan as taking part in the traditions of classical rhetoric, as carried on in the early Middle Ages. Bethurum, for example, states that "Wulfstan's [rhetorical] practice seems to have been modeled on the teachings of Cicero, particularly as they were interpreted by Augustine."[33] Ann Nichols similarly makes the case that Ælfric consciously makes use of principles of classical rhetoric, most notably the use of the "brief style." According to Nichols, Ælfric's Latin prefaces promote the idea of a plain, easy to understand style in language similar to that used by rhetorical authorities such as Fortunatianus, Alcuin, and Julius Victor, whose traditions "can be traced back to Cicero."[34] But notions of Anglo-Saxon homilists as Ciceronians may be overstated. Luke Reinsma argues that little attention would have been paid to the practices of classical rhetoric in Ælfric's times. Citing the manuscript catalogues of Helmut Gneuss and the booklists translated

[31] ibid., 91-2.
[32] Bethurum, *Homilies of Wulfstan*, 88 n. 1.
[33] ibid., 88-9.
[34] Ana Nichols, "Ælfric and the Brief Style," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 70 (1971): 3-4.

by Michael Lapidge, Reinsma asserts that Ælfric would have had scant resources for the study of rhetoric as a formal practice.[35]

However, as I argue in the previous chapter, lack of a clearly written rhetorical tradition is not evidence for a lack of rhetoric. Although Reinsma denies that Ælfric developed a rhetorical style based on the instructions handed down from Cicero, he acknowledges that Ælfric "[i]nasmuch as he was a teacher (and thus an author, diplomat, psychologist, grammarian, and administrator), … was inevitably sensitive to the needs of his audience as well as to the nuances of both his and the Latin language."[36] This focus on the needs of his audience is, I would argue, the clearest evidence of Ælfric's rhetorical skill and intentions. In his vernacular homilies, Ælfric crafts a plain and simple style suited to the needs of his audience with a clear purpose of instructing them in good Christian living.

A similar argument could be made both for and against the idea of Wulfstan as a rhetorician. There is even less evidence for any kind of rhetorical training on Wulfstan's part than there is for Ælfric, but Wulfstan's texts make it clear that he paid careful attention to his rhetorical voice. As Fulk and Cain point out, "Wulfstan's style is crafted to maximize oratorical efficacy, with local effects of sound and sense lending emphasis to his doctrine."[37] He appears to have developed a rhetorical style all his own, employing alliteration, rhyme, and intensifiers. Specific examples of this style will be further explored later in this chapter, in an analysis of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos*. According to Fulk and Cain, various sources, both Latin and English, have been suggested for Wulfstan's style.[38]

[35] Luke Reinsma, "Was Ælfric a Rhetorician?" *Rhetorica* 7 (1989): 341-57.
[36] ibid, 343.
[37] Fulk and Cain, 83.
[38] ibid., 83.

2.3 Apocalypse and Articulation

Wulfstan begins his most famous sermon, written for the year 1014, with a warning that the end is nigh. Almost a millennium later, the apocalyptic rhetoric of fundamentalist Christianity seems strikingly similar to that employed by Wulfstan and Ælfric, frequently invoking eschatological topoi of judgment and punishment, along with Old Testament logic of a sort that might also have appealed to Anglo-Saxon rhetors. At the extreme fringe are groups like Fred Phelps' Westboro Baptist Church, which has earned near universal loathing by picketing the funerals of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their argument – if it can even be called that – is that the soldiers' deaths are punishment for American tolerance of homosexuality.[39] On a slightly less extreme front, fundamentalist pastor Jerry Falwell, a few days after September 11, 2001, blamed the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on "the pagans and the abortionists and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians… the ACLU, People for the American Way, all of them who want to try to secularize America."[40] In 2010, Pat Robertson – the pastor to whom Fallwell made those comments -- claimed that a recent earthquake that had struck Haiti was the result of a pact with the devil Haiti had made at the time of their revolt against the French.[41] Meanwhile, a portion of the Christian publishing industry is devoted to books preparing people for the events described in the book of Revelations to come to pass,

[39] For more on Westboro Baptist Church, see their listing in the Southern Poverty Law Center Inteligence Files, http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/groups/westboro-baptist-church, where they are listed as a hate group. The church itself maintains a variety of offensive URLs, the most infamous of which is www.godhatesfags.com, at which they explain their beliefs. I would also like to point out that I am by no means drawing a comparison between the beliefs of WBC and that of evangelical Christians like Robertson and Falwell, whose rhetoric is mild by comparison.

[40] qtd. in Sharon Crowley, *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006). 115.

[41] Shea, Danny, "Pat Robertson: Haiti 'Cursed' By 'Pact to Devil'," *HuffPost AOL News*, The Huffington Post, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/01/13/pat-robertson-haiti-curse_n_422099.html#.

connecting contemporary and historical events to biblical prophesies about the end times.[42] Many audiences might find such rhetoric and the connections they depend on to be bizarre, distasteful, or downright offensive. However, it is only fair to assume that Phelps, Falwell, and Robertson speak out of sincere belief. They also appeal to audiences who share those beliefs -- with the exception of Phelps, who seems utterly uninterested in appealing to anyone outside his group.

In her book *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*, Sharon Crowley examines the contemporary rhetoric of fundamentalism, like that of Falwell and Robertson, and the apparent failure of liberal discourse to challenge or even engage with it. Liberal discourse, according to Crowley, is founded on consensus, reason, factual evidence and tolerance. The rhetoric of fundamentalism, on the other hand, prioritizes motivated belief, faith, appeals to authority, and other rhetorical moves typically devalued by liberal argument. Key to Crowley's discussion of fundamentalist rhetoric is her account of the relationships among ideological positions taken up by this discourse, "the relationships between and among the moments of belief, fantasy, and myth" that answer to something other than strict reason.[43] Drawing on the ideology criticism of Marxist cultural critics such as Stuart Hall, Slavoj Žižek, Ernst Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, Crowley points out that individual positions which are taken up –articulated – within an ideology can then be joined up – articulated – with other ideologically available positions. Crowley uses the term "ideologic" to describe "articulations in the second sense, connections made between and among moments (positions) that occur or are taken up within

[42] The most famous of these are the books of *Left Behind* series, written by Tim Lahaye and Jerry Jenkins, published by Tyndale Press, which adapt the events of the book of Revelations into an action-packed adventure story with a contemporary setting. Crowley discusses these books at length in *Toward a Civil Discourse*, 102-32.
[43] Crowley, *Toward a Civil Discourse,* 59.

ideology."[44] This ideologic does not need to appeal to logic and reason to be persuasive: its rhetoric often relies on pathos appeals suggestive of a complex web of historical articulations. [45] The power of an ideologic, of course, depends on its ability to connect with an audience's committed belief. For example, one could argue that Fred Phelps fails to gain traction with most audiences because his rhetoric attempts to *dis*articulate positions important to the ideology of American patriotism, such as the inherent nobility of an American soldier's sacrifice and the belief that God is on America's side in terms of military conflict. However, such disarticulations would pose little challenge to an ideologue with a particularly dense web of articulations. The more densely articulated an ideology is, the more those who subscribe to those ideologies will be able to incorporate new information into their belief system: "A tightly articulated ideology can smooth over contradictions that might give rise to dissonance or doubt because it has a ready response for every possible occurrence."[46] Rhetoric that appeals to an audience that subscribes to such a tightly articulated ideology, then, needs not always be internally consistent so long as it consistently appeals to an effective – and affective – ideologic.

I should acknowledge, of course, that comparisons between Tenth- and Eleventh-century rhetoric and Twentieth- and Twenty-first-century rhetoric can only go so far. The ideologic of contemporary Christian fundamentalism, for example, often articulates Christian doctrine and scripture with ideological positions such as capitalism, American exceptionalism, and the theology of millennial dispensationalism,[47] positions wholly alien to the world of Ælfric and Wulfstan. It also should be clear that many elements of late Anglo-Saxon preaching –

[44] ibid., 60.
[45] ibid., 61.
[46] ibid., 105
[47] Dispensationalism is an interpretation of biblical prophecy originating in the 19th century that divides time into various ages and attempts to decouple apocalyptic predictions from specific dates. See Crowley, *Toward a Civil Discourse*, 108-11.

particularly its strict Catholic dogma –would not sit well with the primarily Protestant voices of contemporary Christian fundamentalist rhetoric. Despite these differences, the rhetoric of Wulfstan and Ælfric can profitably be examined through a similar critical lens, as an ideologic driven by the rhetoric of fear. Ælfric and Wulfstan articulate multiple ideological positions in their discourse: the belief that God judges and punishes sins; that these judgments occur during life, after life, and at the end times; and that these judgments are made against individual humans as well as against a nation as a whole.

2.4 A Rhetoric of Judgment

As an example of Ælfric's eschatological theology, compositional practices, and use of rhetoric, I would like to examine the aforementioned homily for the octave of Pentecost, *Sermo ad Populum.* The homily, composed between 1002-5,[48]is different in many ways from Ælfric's other works. It does not deal with a specific daily pericope. As indicated by the "ad populum" in the title, it is directed at a lay audience, expounding on topics, according to Pope, "on which a lay congregation in particular may not be adequately informed."[49] The first of these topics, taking up approximately a fifth of the homily, is the course of the Christian calendar. Ælfric then moves rather suddenly into his second topic for the day: a lengthy explication of the fates of humans' bodies and souls at the time of their death and at the end times.

Although Ælfric's discourse on eschatology is the most relevant to the current discussion, it is worth taking a look at Ælfric's purposes and strategies in the first section. According to Pope, there is no obvious source for this material, and it stands to reason that it is original to Ælfric.[50] He begins by setting out his intentions in the clearest manner possible:

[48] Clemoes, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works," 44, 56.
[49] Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 409.
[50] ibid, 409-10.

> We wyllað eow secgan sume swutelunge nu be þam halgum tidum ðe we healdað and weorðiað on geleaffullum cyrcum mid Godes lofsangum, þæt ge sum andgit þæron tocnawan magon, hu eall ðæs geares ymbegang Gode Ælmigtigum ðeowað" [We will now speak to you clearly about the holy seasons which we hold and honor in the Church of the true faith with God's song of praise, that you some meaning therein may discern, how all of the year's circuit serves God Almighty.] (1-5)[51]

Although the homily is assigned to the date of Pentecost, Ælfric starts his guide to the Christian calendar at the start of the Christian year, with the season of Advent and the Nativity. He then highlights the major festivals and events of the year in sequence: Epiphany, Candlemas, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Rogationtide, and Pentecost. He connects each of these festivals to specific moments of Christ's life, making his description of the Christian year a narrative of Christ. For example, in describing Lent, Ælfric explains that in that season

> we eac swylce wurðiað mid urum lofsangum hu se leofa Hælend on þam westene fæste feowertig daga tosomne, and hu hine ðær costnode se hetela deofol, ac he wearð oferswiðed þurh þone soðan Hælend" [we likewise honor with our song of praise how the beloved Savior in the wilderness fasted forty days in succession, and how the evil devil tempted him there, but he was overcome through the true Savior.] (28-32)

In this way, Ælfric writes all practicing Christians into the story of Christ: by participating in the "lofsang" [song of praise], believers participate in the life, ministry, suffering, and resurrection of Christ.

Ælfric moves through these holidays rather quickly, arriving at Pentecost around line 54. At this point, Ælfric become more expansive in his discussion – it is, after all, the season for which this homily is designated – and proceeds to give a discourse on the Trinity. Ælfric

51

concludes this first section by reminding his audience again of the service done to God Almighty through participation in the cycle of the church calendar, then abruptly announces "ac we nellað nu secgan na swiðor embe ðæt, ac we wyllað embe us sylfe secgan hwætewga" [but we will not now say any more about that, but we will about ourselves say a little] (93-4). This signals his transition to the longer, eschatological portion of the sermon.

For the second section, Ælfric worked primarily from material included in the Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 MS, much of which originates from Julian of Toledo's *Prognosticon Futuri Sæculi*. According to Pope, this work is "designed to answer most of the questions that can be asked" about eschatological matters such as death, the fate of the soul and body after death, and the resurrection on Judgment Day. [52] According to Enid Raynes, Ælfric himself likely arranged this material with the purpose of adapting it for use in vernacular homilies.[53] Ælfric's careful attention to his source is part of what sets the homilies of Ælfric apart from those of the Blickling and Vercelli collections. It appears that Ælfric found this source to be a much more satisfactory work on this subject than the "gedwyld" which he decries in the Preface to the *Catholic Homilies*. As mentioned previously, the anonymous homilists -- whose writings most likely preceded that of Ælfric by at least a generation – freely used sources that would later be rejected because of their questionable theology and canonicity. As Gatch discusses in his article "Two Uses of Apocrypha in Old English Homilies," these sources included eschatological revelations such as *The Apocalypse of Thomas* and *The Apocalypse of Paul*, also known as the *Visio Pauli*. The former, incorporated into Blickling Homily VII and Vercelli Homily XV, was primarily mined for its list of several signs of the impending end times. The latter, incorporated into Vercelli Homily IV, relates a dialogue between a sundered soul and body, the latter

[52] ibid., 408.
[53] Raynes, Enid, "MS. Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric," *Medium Ævum* 26, no. 2 (1957), 65-73.

remonstrating the former for its sins.[54] Ælfric specifically rejects the *Visio*, explaining "Humeta rædað sume men ða leasan gesetnysse, ðe hi hataþ Paulus gesihðe, nu he sylfe sæde þæt he ða digelan word gehyrde, þe nan eorþlic mann sprecan ne mot?" [How do some men read the false composition, which they call the vision of Paul, when he himself said, that he heard the secret words, which no earthly man may speak?].[55]

Julian's explication of the relationship between the soul and body, on the other hand, apparently met Ælfric's standards of authenticity. Like Ælfric's account of the church year, this eschatological discussion places the audience in the framework of biblical narrative, starting at the very beginning with Adam and his fall from grace. Through the Fall, the devil brought death into the world. Quoting his Latin source directly, Ælfric explains that there are three types of death: "*Mors acerba, mors inmatura, mors naturalis*." He translates these into English for his audience as "se bitera deað, se ungeripoda deað, and se gecyndelica" [the bitter death, the unripened death, and the natural{death}] (111-3). But this is just physical death; as Ælfric explains, the death people truly need to fear is the death of the soul. There is a particular emphasis on the attempts of the devil to drag the sinner toward perdition: "Se syrwienda deofol swicað æfre embe us, and on þæs mannes forðsiðe fela cnottan him bryt" [The plotting devil practices deceit ever around us, and in that man's going forth weaves many knots around him] (163-4). Our best hope for avoiding the devil's snares is intercessory prayer, particularly that of monastic clergy. In the midst of this discussion of the need for clergymen to perform such intercessory prayer, Ælfric provides his most vivid exemplum so far:

> we rædað on bocum þæt se reða feond come silce egeslic draca to anum licgenndum cnnihte, wolde his sawle habban for his synnum to helle, ac ðær common munecas to on

[54] Gatch, Milton. "Two Uses of Apocrypha in Old English Homilies," *Church History* 33, no. 4 (1964): 379-91.
[55] Thorpe, Vol. 2, 332.

ðæs mannes forðsiðe, and geornlice bædon for þam geongan cnihte, oððæt hi swa afligdon þone feondlican dracan, and se cniht gewyrpte, and wunode on life, oððæt he his synna gebette, and eft syððan gewat, ac he ne geseah ðone dracan ða, for ðan ðe he oferswiðed wæs

[we read in books that the cruel Enemy would come as a terrible dragon to a prostrating young man, that would have his soul for his sins to hell, but there came monks into that man's going forth, and earnestly prayed for that young man, until they thus put to flight that fiendish dragon, and the young man got better, and dwelled in life, until he made amends for his sins, and afterwards departed, but he saw not that dragon then, because the dragon was overcome].[56]

This exemplum, unlike the material immediately before and after it, is not taken from Julian's *Prognosticon*, nor is it included in the material Ælfric used as his most direct source. Instead, he reuses an episode he had used before, in Homily 35 from the first series of Catholic Homilies. In the earlier use, which ultimately is derived from a homily of Gregory the Great,[57] the victim of draconic visitation is a reprobate monk who receives deathbed intercession from his more devout brothers. Just as in the *Sermo ad Populum*, the beneficiary of the intercession eventually does die, "Ac he ne geseah þone dracan on his forðsiþe: for þan ðe he hine oferswyðde mid gecyrrednysse his heortan [but he saw not the dragon at his departure, for he had overcome him by the conversion of his heart]."[58] The differences between the two uses of this story reflect Ælfric's skill at adapting his sources to different audiences. In the earlier instance, the concern is purely monastic: both the sinner and the intercessors are monks. For the lay audience of this

[56] John C. Pope, ed., *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford U P, 1967), 423.
[57] Godden. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, 297.
[58] Peter Clemoes, ed. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 1997), 484. Trans. in Benjamin Thorpe, *The Sermones Catholoci, or Homilies: In the Original Anlgo-Saxon, with an English Version* (London: Ælfric Society, 1843), 537, http://books.google.com

sermon, it is a "cniht" or young man who is saved.[59] Just as the vernacularity of Ælfric's preaching brings the efforts of Benedictine reform out from the monastery and into the broader world, this change of setting translates Ælfric's concern for the cohesion of the monastery, expressed in this earlier Homily, into a concern that the rest of the world be held together by these monks. Whether directed at a monastic or a lay audience, this exemplum is a vision of terror that would not seem out of place in a horror movie, a comic book, or, for that matter, a poem such as *Beowulf*. Ælfric conflates several themes in this exemplum -- the importance of written doctrine, the spiritual power of monks, the need for laity to live a good Christian life – and places them in a sublimely terrifying setting, inviting the audience to interpolate what might otherwise be a dry discussion of esoteric theology into a fantastic, heroic life-and-death struggle.

The remainder of the homily, although it never reaches quite the excitement of the dragon exemplum, does offer vivid description of the fates of the body and soul after death. Ælfric details the joys of heaven, the travails of purgatory, and the torments of hell. This apportionment is based on the condition of the soul; throughout this discussion, there is a focus on judgment and atonement. In purgatory, some sins can be purged: "Ða leohtan gyltas and ða lytlan synna beoð þonne afeormode þurh ðæt witniendlice fyr, and nis nanes cynnes wite on þyssere worulde swa teart swa swa þæt foresæde fyr þe afeormað þa gymeleasan" [The light offenses and the little sins are then cleansed through that punishing fire, and there is not any king's punishment in this world so severe as that aforesaid fire which cleanses the negligent] (225-8). The amount of suffering relates to what a person has earned in life; it can also be lessened by the prayers of those in heaven and on earth. Ælfric lays out in detail the experience of both holy and sinful

[59] At one point in CH1.35, Ælfric does refer to the suffering monk as "cniht." See Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, 287, n. 243-53. It is conceivable that the "cniht" in *Sermo ad Populum* is also a monk, but there is no indication in the text to suggest this.

souls: the former eagerly await Judgment Day while the latter are tormented by anxiety for the judgment that awaits them and their friends on earth.

This impending judgment takes up the longest section of the homily, which concerns the apportionment of fates at the end times. Aelfric provides some vivid descriptions of the actual events that precede the end times: angels in glory that outshine the sun and moon, fire consuming the earth, the sound of trumpets, and the resurrection of all bodies. Ælfric's account of the end times differs quite a bit in focus and detail from that of the anonymous homilies, particularly those influenced by the apocryphal *Revelation of Thomas*, such as Blickling VII. In that homily, written for Easter Sunday, the anonymous author describes in detail the seven days that will lead up to the final judgment, each one accompanied by a different terror. The apocalypse in *Sermo ad Populum* is vivid, but Ælfric is less specific and less focused on signs of its advent. As I will discuss in more detail below, Wulfstan shows more concern than Ælfric with specific signs of the time; Ælfric's focus is on souls who are prepared for the end times, not with when it would occur.

The state of people's souls shapes their fate at Judgment Day. While some souls are holy enough to join in with the judging, and others are judged worthy because of their faith, many are not so fortunate. Ælfric enumerates several specific types of sinners who are condemned, such as the "unmæðfulle gitseras, wigleras and wiccan, and unlybwyrhtan, þeofas and reaferas, and ða reðan drymen, þa forsworenan men, and ða swicelan wedlogan, ða fulan forliras, and ða fracodan myltestran" [greedy misers, wizards and witches, and sorcerers, thieves and plunderers, and the cruel magicians, the forsworn men, and the deceitful traitors, the foul fornicators, and the infamous prostitutes] (375-89), all of whom are "gedemed mid þam deofle to helle" [damned with the Devil to Hell] (383). With them, as a fourth group, go

ðæra fulra hæðenra þe nane cyðde ne hæfdon to þam heofonlican G[o]de, ne Cristes geleafan ne cuðon on heora life; hi adrugon heora lif on deofles biggengum, and hi butan Godes æ æfre syngodon, and eft butan Godes æ on ecnysse forwurðað, mid þam leasan Cristenum æfre cwylmigende" [the foul heathens which had no kinship with the heavenly God, nor knew belief in Christ in their life; they passed their life in the devil's worship, and without God's law they forever sinned, and afterwards without God's law in eternity are destroyed, with the false Christians forever suffering] (384-90).

At this time of judgment, according to Ælfric, all is made visible:

> Ne mæg þonne nan man nahwar beon behydd, ac eall beoð þær þe æfre cuce wæron, and þær beoð æteowude ure eallra geðohtas, and ealle ure dæde eallum þam werodum; þæt ðe ær wæs gebet ne bið þær na ætweowed, ac ða ungebettan synna beoð þær geswutelode; hi beoð þonne ofsceamode, and sorhfulle on mode, þæt hi ær noldon andettan heora synna, and dædbote gedon be heora lareowes dihte.
>
> [Nor may any man anywhere be hidden, but all are there which ever were alive, and there are revealed our complete thoughts and all our deeds to all that multitude; that which previously was compensated for is not there revealed, but the unforgiven sins are there made clear; they are then put to shame, and sorrowful in spirit, that they previously would not confess their sins, and do penance according to their teacher's instruction]. (391-9)

Once again, Ælfric's exemplum invites his audience to contemplate sin and redemption in terms of fear, this time the fear of exposure: that they might have their worst selves revealed before all, be publicly grouped with other "foul" and "infamous" offenders and with the condemned pagans. For the ultimate division between good and wicked, Ælfric translates the Gospel account of

Matthew 25, in which Christ praises the blessed for showing mercy to him when they saw him in need and condemns the wicked for failing to do so. When each group answers that they had never seen Christ hungry, thirsty, sick, or otherwise distressed, Christ answers that what they had done or failed to do for "anum of ðisum lyttlum minra gebroðra" [any of the least of my brothers] (429), they had done or failed to do for him. At this point, the judgment is concluded: the wicked pass into perdition while the blessed enter the glorious new Heaven and Earth.

2.5 From Eschatology to Invasion

Ælfric's *Sermo ad Populum* provides a thorough outline of eschatological expectations, and by appending it to a summary of the Christian year makes these expectations part of the daily life of Christians. With its discussion of the effectiveness of intercessory prayer by both the clergy and the laity, and with its rejoinders against those who sin, it provides instructions for daily living. However, it does not engage with another important eschatological question: how should Christians interpret cataclysmic events, such as the Viking invasions of the early eleventh century? As Godden points out, such punishment was a fairly common theme in Anglo-Saxon religious writing, taken up by Bede, Alcuin, and Alfred.[60] Later, in the rhetoric of Ælfric and Wulfstan, such notions of collective divine punishment articulate in intriguing ways with eschatological expectations. Godden examines several texts in which the homilists attempt various explanations as to why God would allow pagans to conquer an ostensibly Christian nation. As discussed above, Ælfric referred to Vikings only rarely and for the most part indirectly in his homilies. His most specific discussion of the Viking raids in the context of divine punishment comes in a piece from the *Lives of Saints* known as *De Oratione Moysi*, discussed at length by Godden in "Apocalypse and Invasion." In the homily, Ælfric describes

[60] Godden, "Apocalypse and Invasion," 130.

how the religious leadership of Moses provided the Israelites with moral victory, he turns rather suddenly to events close to his own times:

> Wel we magon geðencan hu wel hit ferde mid us þaða þis igland wæs wunigende on sibbe and munuc-lif wæron mid wurð-scipe gehealdene and ða woruld-menn wæron wære wið heora fynd swa þæt ure word sprang wide geond þas eorðan. Hu wæs hit ða siððan ða þa man towearp munuc lif and godes biggengas to bysmore hæfde buton þæt us com to cealm and hunger and siððan hæðen here us hæfde to bysmere
>
> [We can well consider how well things fared with us when this island was living in peace, and monasteries were treated with honour and the laity were vigilant against their enemies, so that our fame sprang widely throughout this world. What happened then afterwards, when people overthrew the monasteries and treated God's services with contempt, but that disease and hunger came upon us, and afterwards a heathen army treated us with contempt].[61]

Here, Ælfric makes it clear that the harassment by the heathen *here* is punishment for the sins of the people, particularly for the destruction of monasteries. In despoiling monasteries, Ælfric suggests that the English are ruining their best hope for relief from punishment. As Godden points out, Ælfric's sermon suggests the monks can save the English both through intercession and by merely being present in the land.[62]

A decade or two after Ælfric wrote *De Oratione Moysi*, Wulfstan composed a much more detailed framework for understanding the Viking raids in the context of divine judgment in *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, or "The Sermon of the Wolf to the English People," edited by Bethurum in three versions as number XX. Although it is his most famous sermon, Bethurum finds it "the

[61] Qtd. and trans. in Godden, "Apocalypse and Invasion," 134-5. For the full text of this homily, see Walter Skeat ed. and trans., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 2 vols. (London: EETS, 1900), vol. 1, 282-305.
[62] Godden, "Apocalypse and Invasion," 136.

least characteristic of him," dealing much more so than most of his works with contemporary events.[63] Like Ælfric's sermon for the octave of Pentecost discussed above, this is a sermo ad populum, directed at a lay audience and focusing on their failure to abide by their duties to God and His church. As stated above, Wulfstan uses the sermon's title and opening to provide a temporal and narrative framework for his audience: this is an address to the English at a specific time – a time of persecution by foreign foes, but this time in the present as part of the larger timeframe of history, specifically the Antichrist's time. Earlier in his career, Wulfstan had dealt with the coming of the Antichrist extensively in five homilies probably written around the year 1000.[64] He did not return to this theme until the composition of *Sermo Lupi*, probably in 1014.[65] In the earlier eschatological homilies, he occasionally connected signs of the Antichrist's advent to current events, as he does in Bethurum III, discussed above, when he connects foreign invasion to the Gospel prediction that "nation shall rise up against nation." His discussion in *Sermo Lupi*, however, is much more focused and detailed, engaging specifically with the eschatological topoi of judgment, division, punishment, and redemption.

Although the coming of the Antichrist is cited as exigence at the beginning of the sermon, Wulfstan focuses much of the text on the present day. His message is clear: the English are suffering because of their sins, and their only hope is through atonement: "Forþam mid miclan earnungan we geearnedan þa yrmða þe us onsittað, and mid swyþe micelan earnungan we þa bote motan æt Gode geræcann gif hit seal heonanforð godiende weorðan" [Because with much merit we earned that misery which oppresses us, and with very much earning we that atonement

[63] Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, 344.
[64] ibid, 143.
[65] *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos* exists in at least three versions of differing length. There is considerable controversy about the dating and sequence of the three versions. Bethurum and Whitelock both argue that shortest version is the earliest and that Wulfstan expanded it through several versions before finally arriving at the longest version. Others, such as Greenfield and Calder argue that the longest version is the earliest. Godden, in "Invasion and Apocalypse" summarizes the arguments on both sides, ultimately siding for the most part with Bethurum and Whitelock. All references to *Sermo Lupi* will be to the longest version edited by Bethurum as number XX.

must from God obtain if it shall henceforth get better] (20-23). Although it is the foreign invaders – the Danes referenced in the title – that have brought about the misery, Wulfstan focuses at the beginning on the crimes of the English and treats the heathen horde as ambiguously positive examples. He decries the fact that

> On hæþenum þeodum ne dear man forhealdan lytel ne micel þæs þe gelagod is to gedwolgoda weorðunge, and we forealdað æghwær Godes gerihta ealles to gelome. And ne dear man gewannian on hæþenum þeodum inne ne ute ænig þæra þinga þe gedwolgodan broht bið and to lacum betæht bið, and we habbað Godes hus inne and ute clænne berypte. And Godes þeowas syndan mæþe and munde gewelhwær bedælde; and gedwolgoda þenan ne dear man misbeodan on ænige wisan mid hæþenum leodum, swa swa man Godes þeowum nu deð to wide þær cristene scoldan Godes lage healdan and Godes þeowas griðian.
>
> [Among heathen people, men dare not withhold little or much of that which is ordained to the honor of false gods, and we withhold everywhere God's dues all too frequently. And men among heathen people dare not diminish inside or out any of the things which to the false gods are brought and for sacrifice are commended, and we have God's house inside and out cleanly despoiled. And God's servants are of honor and protection everywhere deprived; and men dare not mistreat false gods' servants in any way amid heathen people, as men God's servants now do too widely where Christians should keep God's law and protect God's servants].[66]

It is worth taking a moment to examine the rhetorical brilliance of this passage. Throughout this section, as he does throughout the sermon, he makes use of word pairs, such as "lytel ne micel," "inne ne/and ute," and "mæþe and munde." Three times, he repeats "ne dear man" in

[66] ibid, 268.

combination with "hæþenum þeodum/leodum." Each time, this is contrasted with what Wulfstan's ostensibly Christian audience has done or has failed to do. He sets up a further contrast between "hæþenum þeodum" and "Godes þeowas/um." The overall effect is a condemnation of the Christian Anglo-Saxons in the light of the behavior of the heathens. Of course Wulfstan doesn't argue that the heathens are good, just that they – despite the fact that they worship false gods and are therefore condemned – possess the respect of religious shrines that those who worship the true God seem to lack. Moreover, this comparison allows Wulfstan to fix his audience rhetorically. As Stephen Harris points out, the audience Wulfstan spoke to was made up of both Anglo-Saxons and Danes who had settled and converted to Christianity generations before. The audience Wulfstan addresses as "we" and "us" was most likely of mixed ethnicity, but unified as a "þeod," [people], just as the heathens are a "þeod." According to Harris, what qualifies both groups as a people is their own common worship practices. By neglecting to practice their religion as they should, as even the condemned heathens do, the English risk losing their identity: "In a community that defines itself in part by its religious practice, failure of an individual to worship in the prescribed manner risks exclusion from the community, just as it risks dissolution of the community itself."[67]

It is not just that Anglo-Saxon Christians are worse than heathens at religious devotion than heathens; it is that they are worse at it than their persecutors. As Howe points out,

> references to heathenism could not be construed simply in religious terms. For the Anglo-Saxons, heathens meant Scandinavians, and Scandinavians meant a clear and present danger to their survival as a people. To explain the linked political and religious threat

[67] Stephen Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 126. See also Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 13-14.

> facing the English meant to announce the invading heathen þeod as the agent of God's will.[68]

To make matters worse, Wulfstan explains that God has allowed these pagans to flourish and harass the English:

> Ne dohte hit nu lange inne ne ute, ac wæs here and hete on gewelhwilcan ende oft and gelome, and Engle nu lange eal sigelease and to swyþe geyrgde þurh Godes yrre, and flotmen swa strange þurh Goddes þafunge þæt oft on gefeohte an feseð tyne and hwilum læs, hwilum ma, eal for urum synnum" [Nor does it prosper now for a long time inside or outside, but there was devastation and malice in nearly every end often and frequently, and the English now are for a long time all without victory and too much disheartened through God's ire, and pirates (i.e. Vikings) so strong through God's permission that often in battle one drives away ten, and sometimes less, sometimes more, all because of our sins] (109-13).

Here Wulfstan makes it most explicit that the Viking harassment is tied in specifically to God's irritation with the English people. Because of their sins, he has granted fierce strength to the heathen army that persecutes them.

Later, Wulfstan expands on this theme by comparing the Vikings' invasion and conquest to the English people's own conquest of the Britons, alluding to the historian Gildas' report that God had allowed the conquest of the British because of their sins:

> An þeodwita wæs on Brytta tidum Gildas hatte. Se awrat be heora misdædum hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinnan and Brytta dugeþe fordon mid eall." [There was a historian in British times named Gildas. He wrote about their misdeeds how they with their sins so

[68] Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 15.

excessively severely provoked God that he let at length the English army their land conquer and the British nobility destroy altogether] (176-9).

According to Godden, with this comparison "Wulfstan was, consciously or not, turning to a story which allowed for eventual acceptance of the invaders within the fold of religion and civilization."[69] The heathens, shown by Wulfstan to be more faithful to their false gods than the English are to their true God, by divine intervention are now poised to take the narrative full circle and supplant the English in their own land.

Crucial to the rhetoric of *Sermo Lupi*, in addition to the persistent theme of transgression and punishment, is the division between those who have rejected God and those who accept him. Furthermore, Wulfstan makes it clear that there is interchange between those groups. Those who accept God at one time may in time reject him through their actions and their inactions, just as the British did before their conquest by the English, and just as the English are doing as they are threatened with conquest by the Vikings. Those who reject God may turn back to him, as the English must do if they have any hope or survival, or as Wulfstan seems to imply the Vikings may do if God should allow them ultimate victory.

Throughout *Sermo Lupi*, Wulfstan uses the threat of Viking conquest as part of a rhetoric of fear. The eschatological aspect is clear when seen in the light of divine judgment and punishment, but becomes somewhat problematic when viewed in a specifically apocalyptic context. By beginning his sermon by invoking the end, Wulfstan seems to suggest that there is a connection between the worsening of the world and the coming time of the Antichrist. But does this mass chaos and wrongdoing actually bring about the age of apocalypse? Greenfield and Calder suggests that this is Wulfstan's message, that he does not "view the tribulation of the last

[69] Godden, "Apocalypse and Invasion," 156.

days as simply a punishment for sin, but instead he sees the retributive process dynamically."[70] In other words, the sinfulness of the people and the accompanying retribution match each other until the punishment rises to the level of apocalypse. However, Harris challenges this viewpoint. For Harris, Wulfstan is not linking the coming of the Antichrist and the increase in sinning causally, rather, "Wulfstan merely note[s] the trope that the world worsens in sin as it ages, and some day soon, time will end."[71] The world is not ending because it is getting worse, but because God said it would; it is only incidentally getting worse. This trope is elsewhere in vernacular homilies as well. For example, Ælfric ends *De Oratione Moysi* by invoking the end times and the accompanying chaos: "Þes tima is ende-next and ende þyssere worulde and men beoð geworhte wolice him betwynan swa þæt se fæder winð wið his agene sunu and broðor wið oþerne to bealwe him sylfum" [This time is last and the ending of this world and people will be made evil towards each other, so that the father fights with his own son and brother with his brother, to their own destruction]. In Vercelli Homily XV, drawing from the apocryphal *Revelation of Thomas*, the anonymous homilists warns of very specific evils that will be the sign of end times, as priests become evil and houses of worship are despoiled and abandoned.

Even if the end of the world isn't coming directly as a result of the English people's sins, Wulfstan clearly establishes a causal relationship between these sins and the hardships they suffer. In doing so, Wulfstan invokes what Patrick Wormald calls "Old Testament logic:" put simply, the idea "that the cause of political disaster was sin and crime."[72] This kind of logic can be seen throughout the *Sermo Lupi* as Wulfstan explains to the English people the causes of their

[70] Greenfield and Calder, *New Critical History*, 90-1.
[71] Harris, *Race and Ethnicity*.
[72] Patrick Wormald, "*Engla Lond*: The Making of an Allegiance," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994): 1-24, 15.

suffering and how this suffering can be ameliorated. According to Harris, Wulfstan expects his audience to take responsibility both for themselves and their community:

> In the *Sermo*, his appeal is not to a king or to a public service or to the clergy, but directly to English individuals. In this he implies that individuals have a role to play in the health of the nation. He seems to expect some understanding of individual, lay responsibility – beyond Christian responsibility. By an extension of Old Testament logic to the more secular realm of the law, if the health of the community depends on the behavior of its members, then it must be the responsibility of the community to police its own recalcitrant members.[73]

According to Old Testament logic, the English bring suffering upon themselves through sinning; by extension, through atonement, they may lessen their suffering. But how can this logic relate to the overtly apocalyptic opening? As Godden points out, the emphasis on Vikings as punishment doesn't mesh with the emphasis on apocalyptic themes: if such invasions have historical precedents, if they could be averted through the intercession of holy men, how can they also be signs of an inevitable apocalypse? Are the Vikings, as Wulfstan had suggested in *Secundum Lucan*, a sign that nation is rising up against nation as part of the coming of the Antichrist? If so, one would think it should be an inevitable, perhaps even desirable occurrence, not one that is brought about for specific offenses and can be put off through specific atonement. A similar issue can be seen in Ælfric's *De Oratione Moysi*. Ælfric's commitment to Old Testament logic is very clear as he makes the connection between harassment by the heathen *here* and the destruction of English monasteries. However, As Ælfric attempts to help his audience comprehend these attacks from a theological perspective, Godden argues, he "seems to be trying out several different historical models," looking at the problem via paradigms of divine aid,

[73] Harris, *Race and Ethnicity*, 121.

divine punishment, and apocalyptic tribulation.[74] In order to unpack this seeming contradiction in the eschatological rhetoric of Wulfstan and Ælfric, I would like to return to the previous discussion of articulation and ideologic.

From the perspective of ideologic, this apparent contradiction isn't so problematic. The competing paradigms are articulated through Ælfric's rhetoric of fear. It is not just Ælfric who tries out multiple historical models; he invites his audience to do so as well. Also available as a layer of articulations are Ælfric's homilies on sin, judgment, and the end times – along with their late Latin analogues and sources. Throughout his writing, Ælfric employs rhetoric that invites audiences to chose among multiple articulations in order to reach a certain conclusion: that during times of duress, whatever their source, it is best to turn away from sin and the world and toward God and his servants. Wulfstan's rhetoric, like that of Ælfric, articulates the Vikings as both agents of divine punishment and signs of the apocalypse. At the same time, he re-articulates the Vikings as potentially better than the English, potentially more suited to destroy the English and supplant them as God's people.

Ælfric and Wulfstan employ many complex rhetorical strategies in their discussion of the Viking problem and the impending days of judgment, and this presentation represents only a brief sampling. Reading this rhetoric through the lens of contemporary critical theory reveals a live rhetoric, one that is conscience of its audience and engaged with powerful, motivated beliefs. These motivated beliefs represent Ælfric and Wulfstan's participation in and contributions to the powerful traditions of Anglo-Saxon culture. Although Anglo-Saxon rhetoric often seems alien and esoteric, careful reading shows it to have the power that all effective rhetoric has to engage with and change an audience's hearts and minds.

[74] ibid, 137.

CHAPTER 3

FEARING NO EVIL: THE RHETORIC OF FEAR AND THE DELIMINATION OF HOLINESS IN *ANDREAS* AND *ELENE*

3.1 The Rhetoric of Saintliness

Ælfric's series of homilies known as *The Lives of Saints* – discussed in the preceding chapters – contains multiple statements providing rhetorical justification for preaching and learning about the lives of those who have lived and died for their beliefs. In the Latin preface to the collection, after explaining that he had already recounted the lives of many popular saints in his two prior sets of *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric explains that the current set will now translate "those saints whom not the vulgar, but the monks, honour by special services." After cautioning that it is unwise to offer too much material in the vernacular "lest peradventure the pearls of Christ be had in disrespect," he maintains that these saints' lives will be a boon to believers who "are slothful in faith, since the Passions of the Martyrs greatly revive a failing faith."[1] He begins his English preface with a similar statement to that of the Latin – leaving out, understandably, the fears of laying pearls before vernacular swine – continuing with a section of his characteristic rhythmic prose in which he explains that

> we woldon gesettan be sumum þas boc
> mannum to getrymminge and to munde us sylfum
> þæt hi us þingion to þam ælmihtigan gode
> swa swa we on worulde heora wundra cyðað

[1] Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, 4.

> [we desire to write this book concerning some of them {i.e., the saints}, for the encouragement of other men and for our own security, that they may intercede for us with Almighty God, even as we on earth make known their miracles].[2]

Later in the collection, in the homily titled "On the Memory of the Saints" and edited by Skeat as XVI, Ælfric exhorts his audience, "Nu sceole we hogian mid mycelne gymene / þæt ure lif beo swa gelogod / þæt ure ende geendige in god." [Now we have to take care, with great diligence, that our life shall be so ordered, that our end may end in God].[3] In order to do so, it is necessary to live by the examples set by the patriarchs, the apostles, the early Christian martyrs, and the later confessors who drove out heretics. And according to Ælfric, there is no time like the present to take heed: as he does with the homilies discussed in the preceding chapter, Ælfric provides an eschatological context for understanding his message: "Nu on urum dagum on ende þyssere worulde / swicað se deofol digollice embe us" [Now in our days, in the end of this world, the devil secretly layeth snares about us].[4] To summarize, Ælfric seems to view the stories of saints as serving to strengthen the faithful, primarily by modeling faithful behavior. Moreover, it is important to share stories of what the honored dead can do for us in this life – miracles – and the next – intercession with God. Hagiography, from this perspective, is an inherently rhetorical genre.

Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* represents just one part of a much larger genre of Anglo-Saxon hagiography. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of saints, relics, and hagiography to the religious life of the Anglo-Saxon people.[5] Following their conversion to Christianity in the

[2] ibid., 7, ll. 70-3.
[3] ibid., 336-7, ll. 5-7.
[4] ibid., 352-3, ll. 220-1.
[5] The role of saints in Anglo-Saxon culture is discussed in many sources; a very good overview can be found in Michael Lapidge, "The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England," cited elsewhere in this chapter. For a focus on Anglo-Saxon hagiography, see Rachel Anderson's chapter on "Saints' Legends" in Fulk and Cain, and Rosemary Woolf's chapter on "Saints' Lives" in E.G. Stanley's *Continuations and Beginnings.*

sixth and seventh centuries, the cult of the saints became an important part of Anglo-Saxon culture. This conversion, narrated by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* produced a number of saints. The earliest native English saint mentioned in this account is Oswald, a seventh-century Northumbrian King whose military victories helped to cement Christian hegemony in England. Since there was, at this time, no official canonization process, a large number of saints' cults flourished throughout the Christian world. The English church worshipped, housed, and wrote about many different saints; according to Michael Lapidge, "[T]he longest Anglo-Saxon litany (London, British Library, Harley 863, from Exeter) includes some 125 martyrs, 100 confessors and 70 virgins. From these figures … we may suppose that some 300 saints (not counting patriarchs and apostles) were culted in Anglo-Saxon England."[6] Much of what we know about these cults comes from Anglo-Saxon hagiographic texts. Hagiographic texts existed in a variety of forms, serving a variety of liturgical, instructional, and devotional purposes. As Lapidge points out, with such a large number of saints, many of them perhaps strange and alien to the laity and clergy, the Church needed some form of textual store of basic knowledge, such as dates of veneration and means of martyrdom, "for only with such knowledge could they be petitioned effectively for help."[7] Simple liturgical calendars recorded the most basic information about a saint's feast days; according to Lapidge, twenty-five such calendars survive, mostly from the eleventh century.[8] When a more detailed account of a saint was desired, they became the subject of a *passio* or *vita*, the former appropriate to a saint who died a martyr, the latter for a saint "whose impeccable service to God constituted a metaphorical, not a real, martyrdom."[9] These two forms – the death and glorification of a martyr and the

[6] Michael Lapidge, "The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England," in Godden and Lapidge, 247
[7] ibid., "Saintly Life," 247.
[8] ibid, 247.
[9] ibid., 252.

blameless life of a holy leader – are the two basic forms of what might be called hagiography proper, or saint's lives.

In addition to the numerous Latin accounts of saints' lives in both prose and verse, and the significant quantity of vernacular prose lives, such as those in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, there are five lengthy Old English poems surviving in two manuscripts that recount saint's lives: *Elene* and *Andreas*, found in the Vercelli Book, and the Exeter Book's *Juliana* and *Guthlac A* and *B*.[10] If we accept Ælfric's stated rhetorical purposes of the hagiographic genre, we can expect that these poems would provide some model of holiness. In this chapter, focusing on two of these poems, *Andreas* and *Elene*, I examine the ways in which the rhetoric of fear provides such a model. The saint, as a paragon of virtue, is frequently defined in opposition to a fearful and wholly corrupt Other, embodied in heathens, unbelievers, demons, and monsters. Their roles as holy and damned are delimited through the rhetoric of fear, specifically by their response to fearful situations. The damned, although they themselves are often frightening, respond with rhetoric of fearfulness, inaction, and obstinacy. The holy – including those who were once among the damned – respond with rhetoric of fearlessness, action, and transcendence. In *Andreas*, tropes of fear, torture, and monstrosity draw clear lines between the sublime believer and the abject heathen. *Elene* puts the weapons of rhetoric in the hands of the saints, who use words to confine, condemn, and even convert their spiritual opponents. By examining these texts through their deployment of the rhetoric of fear, we can interrogate the ways in which they

[10] In addition to these five poems, there are a few poetic works that, while sharing some affinity with the hagiographic genre, are not hagiography in and of themselves. For example, the brief martyrology known as *The Fates of the Apostles*, appended to *Andreas* describes the final missions and deaths of the remaining followers of Christ, but contains little in the way of narrative. Another poem, *Judith*, found in the *Beowulf* manuscript, follows many of the narrative conventions of hagiography, but its heroine – a figure from the Old Testament Apocrypha – is not, properly speaking, a saint. There is also a brief poem known as "The Menologium" or "The Old English Metrical Calendar" which, as the second title suggests, contains a list of saints' names and feast days. See "The Menologium," *The Old English Minor Poems*, Ed. Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie, *ASPR* VI,47-55.

construct a Christian subject in a world defined by oppositions between holy and damned, believer and heathen, divine and demonic.

3.2 The Nature of Holiness in the Hagiographic Genre

In order to understand the ways in which *Andreas* and *Elene* model holiness, it will be necessary to explain a few things about the hagiographic genre as it was practiced in Anglo-Saxon England. From Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages, stories of saints' lives, deaths, and post-mortem activities were among the most popular texts of the Christian world.[11] Such veneration can be clearly seen in the culture of Anglo-Saxon England. Much as they did with homiletic texts – discussed in the previous chapter – the Anglo-Saxons developed a hagiographic tradition at once rooted in traditions of Late Antique Mediterranean Christianity and shaped by the their own Germanic culture. A substantial body of these texts, including lives, calendars, and martyrologies – essentially, a calendar with some narrative expansion[12] – were written in Latin; a number of these were translated into or composed in the vernacular.[13] Accompanying these were texts that, while not strictly focused on hagiography, contained many references to sanctity, such as Aldhelm's *Carmen de Virginitate* and Bede's *Historia*. The earliest extant vernacular life is a ninth-century Mercian prose life of St. Chad.[14] Many more vernacular lives would be written,[15] most of them by Ælfric. As discussed above, hagiographic texts can be found scattered

[11] For a thorough historical account of the Late Antique origins of the cult of saints, see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: U of Chicago P), 1981.
[12] Lapidge, "Saintly Life," 250-1. Some of these Latin litanies are collected in Lapidge's *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints* (London: Boydell, 1991).
[13] Examples would include the "Metrical Calendar" referred to above and a document referred to as the *Secgan*, discussed by D.W. Rollason in "Lists of Saints' Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo Saxon England* 7 (1978): 61-93, a document which lists the resting places of various saints and parts of saints, mostly in England.
[14] Woolf, Rosemary, "Saints' Lives," *Continuations and Beginnings*, ed. Eric Gerald Stanley. London: Nelson, 1966. 37-66. This life is edited by Rudolf Vleeskruyer as *The Life of St. Chad: an Old English Homily* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1953).
[15] For a full account of extant Old English prose saints' legends, see Alex Nichols, "The Corpus of Prose Saints Lives." *Reading Medieval Studies* 20 (1994): 51-87.

throughout his first two series of *Catholic Homilies*, but the bulk of them are collected in his third collection of homilies, known as the *Lives of Saints*.

As is the case with the vernacular homilies, Anglo-Saxon saints' lives engage with Germanic traditions while maintaining a strong connection to the conventions of Latinate hagiography. With the hagiographic texts, this pull towards generic conservatism is perhaps a little stronger than it is in other homilies. Many Anglo-Saxon hagiographic texts, such as Aldhelm's *Carmen de Virginitate,* sections of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, imitate or reproduce earlier saints' lives, even when writing about native Anglo-Saxon saints. For example, Felix's Latin life of Saint Guthlac of Crowland – the basis of *Guthlac B,* also existing in an Old English version -- borrows verbatim, in some instances, from Late Antique Latin lives of Saints Martin and Anthony. This heavy reliance on earlier authorities is reflective of medieval attitudes toward authorial practices, as discussed in chapter two, and it also reflects the deeply seated generic conventions of the saint's life. Most saints' lives can be categorized as either a *vita* or a *passio*. As Lapidge explains, both the *vita* and the *passio* nearly always followed a predictable pattern. The former would trace the saint from noble birth through his conversion and growing ecclesiastical influence, ending with his peaceful death. The latter was much more highly charged. In a *passio*,

> the saint, usually of noble birth, adopts Christianity in days when the state government is pagan; the saint is brought before a local magistrate or governor and asked to recant his/her Christianity by sacrificing to the gods; the saint refuses to do so, even on the pain of innumerable tortures (normally described in excruciating detail), and is eventually killed, usually by beheading.[16]

[16] Lapidge, "Saintly," 252-3.

Although only one of the vernacular verse legends mentioned above is truly a *passio* – Juliana – all five feature stories, imagery, and rhetoric associated with torture and fear. In fact, the vernacular poetic legends seem far less concerned with the generic functions of *passio* and *vita* than they are with providing vivid and frightening rhetorical examples. Indeed, the poetic saint's lives are much freer with generic conventions than are other hagiographic texts. All are derived from earlier source material, but unlike the vernacular prose lives of Ælfric, which primarily paraphrase and condense earlier Latin lives, these texts reshape their sources through additions and changes that are, according to Rachel Anderson, "tinged by the conventions of heroic verse."[17] The extent to which these poems are directly influenced by heroic poetry such as *Beowulf* is a subject of much debate, which will be explored later in this chapter; at the very least, it is clear that in the vernacular verse legends, we are dealing with a different kind of hagiography. Still, the rhetoric is much the same: these men and women are great models for holiness, having withstood much suffering.

It is worth questioning why these poems would prioritize elements of torment and fear in their presentations of saints' lives. Readers new to hagiography may find disturbing the vivid, gruesome, embodied violence that often plays a central role in the characters' path to sainthood. To cite just one example, in Ælfric's life of St. Agatha, the young virgin submits to torture at the hands of pagans rather than give up her faith. Her oppressors "on hencgene astreccan / and ðrawan swa swa wiððan wælhreowlice" [stretch her on the rack and cruelly twist her like a withy rope] (ll. 112-13). When this proves insufficient, the pagan judge orders his men to "gewriðan / on ðam breoste mid þære hencgene and het siððan ofaceorfan" [torture her on the breast in the rack, and bade it afterward be cut off] (122-23). Other saints in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* are

[17] Anderson, "Saint's Legends," 97-8.

similarly tortured, as well as doused in urine (Chrysanthus), thrown into a latrine (Julian and Basilissa), and boiled alive for three days (Cecilia).

The textual violence of the saint's martyrdom serves the rhetorical purpose of solidly connecting the saint to Christ, the *imitatio Christi* in which the saint imitates not just Christ's life as a mortal, blessing the poor and healing the sick, but also his death. This suffering also connects him or her to the origins of the Christian tradition of the late Roman Empire. According to Judith Perkins,

> The triumph of Christianity was, in part at least, a triumph of a particular representation of the self. Through a number of discursive practices, individuals began to think of themselves as bodies liable to pain and suffering. As sufferers, categories of people came to be viewed as "us," and were afforded a cultural attention and community concern that they had not had in the traditional Greco-Roman world.[18]

This model of the self as a sufferer did not spring up anew in the form of Christianity. According to Perkins, "texts from the late first and early second centuries A.D. demonstrate that this conception of the self as sufferer was already circulating in the cultural discourse of the period."[19] Early Christian discourse thrived on this conception, and developed a narrative tradition based on the idea of the suffering individual. Through this narrative tradition, stories of martyrs and saints brought "to cultural consciousness a reality different from that previously provided in the prose narratives of the Greco-Roman world and… introduced new types of actors onto the cultural stage."[20] The rhetorical model of the *passio* – in which a believer joins the community of the blessed by suffering and dying in commitment to that community – became

[18] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 12.
[19] ibid., 3-4
[20] ibid., 120

the model for holiness for believers: if this is what early Christians endured for their beliefs, what can you endure for yours? This modeling of steadfastness in the face of embodied violence and fearful rhetoric can clearly be seen in the two texts that will be the focus of this chapter, *Andreas* and *Elene*. In *Andreas*, the suffering body of the saint is brought front and center. Through violence and monstrosity, the rhetoric of the text explores the boundary between the holy and the damned: on the one side, the sublime transformation of the saint from suffering body to miraculous wholeness; on the other side, the abject terror of the pagan monster. In *Elene*, this dividing line is explored in different ways: those who suffer the most are those who refuse to believe, who hide their knowledge and trust in false wisdom, and it is only by turning to God that a person can transcend fearfulness and become a master of the rhetoric of fear. But transcendence in *Elene* is based on harsh exclusions and disturbing prejudices, notably the anti-Judaic hostilities that are a common trope in many early Christian texts.

3.3 From Gory to Glory

Andreas and *Elene* are both found in the Vercelli Book, a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon codex that somehow made its way to Vercelli in Northern Italy.[21] In addition to these poems, the manuscript contains the twenty three anonymous prose homilies known as the "Vercelli Homilies," and four other religious poems: *The Fates of the Apostles*, a brief martyrology attached to *Andreas*; *Soul and Body I*, another version of a poem found in the Exeter Book; a fragment of a homiletic poem, now known by the rather unimaginative title *Homiletic Fragment*

[21] In addition, the poems share a connection to Cynewulf who, besides Cædmon, is the only named poet of Old English verse, his name being spelled out in runes in four poems: *Christ II* and *Juliana* (both in the Exeter Book) and *Elene* and *The Fates of the Apostles*. Since *The Fates of the Apostles* is appended to *Andreas*, some have associated that poem with Cynewulf as well. See Daniel Calder, *Cynewulf* (Boston: Twayne, 1981) and Robert Bjork, ed., *Cynewulf: Basic Readings* (New York: Garland, 1996). Little is known about Cynewulf's identity beyond the seemingly autobiographical clues left in his runic signatures, and although speculation about his identity was once fruitful ground for Anglo-Saxonists, interest in Cynewulf as an individual poet has waned in recent years. See, for example, Carol Braun Pasternak, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1995), 14.

I; and *The Dream of the Rood*, a well-known dream vision of the cross.[22] As is the case with all Old English poetry, none of the poems in the manuscript is titled, nor are these titles necessarily appropriate. For example, although Andrew is the focus of *Andreas*, Matthew plays a significant supporting role. The title character of *Elene* shares the spotlight with two other venerated figures: her son Constantine and the newly converted bishop Cyriacus. In terms of rhetorical focus, however, these two characters really are the stars of their eponymous poems: the rhetoric employed by Andrew and Elene shapes the delimitation of holiness in each of these poems.

I will begin by examining *Andreas* and its portrayal of a saint's transformation. *Andreas* is based on a Latin translation, no longer extant, of an apocryphal Greek account of the Acts of the Apostles.[23] The Old English poem begins with the apostle Matthew taking the gospel to the island of Mermedonia, an island whose inhabitants imprison, mutilate, and eventually kill and eat all visitors. From prison, Matthew calls out to God, who promises to send his fellow-apostle Andrew to rescue him. Andrew is initially reluctant to make the dangerous journey, but is ultimately persuaded to board a ship bound for Mermedonia. Upon arrival on the dreaded island, Andrew succeeds in freeing Matthew and the other captives of the cannibals, but he himself is captured and tortured. Calling on Christ, he is healed of his wounds. After this healing, Andrew visits God's wrath on the city, first destroying the wicked with a mighty flood, then bringing many of them back to life and –more importantly – into the fold of Christianity.

Critical discussions of *Andreas* have tended to focus on its relation to the oral tradition of heroic poetry, especially to *Beowulf*, and many critics read *Andreas* as a poem rooted as much in

[22]All the poems of the Vercelli Book are edited together by George Philip Krapp as Volume II of the *ASPR*. For a thorough critical discussion of the works in the manuscript, see *New Readings in the Exeter Book*, ed. Samantha Zacher and Andy Orchard, Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2009.

[23] The Greek source is titled *Πρ ξεις Άνδρέον κα ί Ματθεία είς τήν χώραη τών άνθρωποφάγων*. According to Brooks, *Andreas and the Fates of the Apostles*, xv, the Greek version cannot be the source of the poem, since the poem includes specific incidents not found in the Greek text. Given "the limited knowledge of Greek in Anglo-Saxon England," it is likely that the intermediate text was in Latin.

the heroic tradition as in the hagiographic. In the introduction to his 1906 edition of the poem, George Philip Krapp describes *Andreas* as "representative of that group of Anglo-Saxon poems in which Christian themes are treated in the spirit of the secular, heroic poetry."[24] According to Krapp, the heroic roots of the poem are clear in its use of specifically heroic language and themes, with its references to spiritual warfare and its elaborate descriptions of buildings and cities. Krapp further suggests that *Andreas* does more than just borrow the trappings of poems; it consciously imitates the most famous Old English heroic poem, *Beowulf.* According to Krapp, the narrative of *Andreas* follows a similar structure to that of *Beowulf.* Moreover, there are "frequent parallelism of phrasing between the two poems, as though the author, regarding his hero as another Beowulf, strove as much as possible to tell his story in the same language as the story of Beowulf."[25] Although later critics tend to shy away from claiming the connection between *Beowulf* and *Andreas* with as much certainty as Krapp does, it is a common trope in studies of *Andreas* to point to this similarity. For example, Charles Kennedy claims that "[m]any passages suggest that the poet must have known the *Beowulf* well, and must have intentionally adopted its form and spirit to govern his own narrative of the heroic deeds of St. Andrew."[26] Leonard J. Peters, however, differs with this critical opinion significantly, claiming that "*Andreas* is not a 'Christian *Beowulf*,' and … we should not consider *Beowulf* a model used by the *Andreas* poet."[27] According to Peters, critics such as Krapp and Kennedy have paid too much attention to de-contextualized similarities in vocabulary and have ignored the relationship between *Andreas* and its direct sources. The question of the relationship between *Andreas* and other heroic poetry is unsettled, but given the highly formulaic nature of Old English poetry and

[24] Krapp, George Philip, ed, *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles: Two Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poems*, Boston: Ginn, 1906. li.
[25] ibid., lv-lvi.
[26] Kenedy, *Earliest English Poetry*, 267.
[27] Leonard J. Peters, "The Relationship of the Old English *Andreas* to *Beowulf*." *PMLA* 66 (1951). 845.

the fragmentary state of the corpus, it is perhaps beyond the ability of scholars to settle the question with any degree of certainty.

More productive grounds for critical discussions, perhaps, can be found in typological and allegorical aspects of the narrative. Certain elements suggest Christian symbolism: for example, the Mermedonians' cannibalism and the flood that both destroys and renews them might profitably be read as figural representations of the rites of the Eucharist and Baptism. Mermedonia itself may be read as a kind of hell, with the Mermedonians serving as both tormenting devils and damned souls waiting to be harrowed by a Christ figure. However, as John Hermann argues, "the typological framework which makes it possible to read the allegory of war in *Andreas* also tends to privilege the theological and suppress the sociopolitical level,"[28] neglecting the historicity of the text's central oppositions between insider and outsider that help to delimit the Christian world. In my reading of *Andreas*, I wish to work around this blind spot by entering the text at the level of rhetoric. The ways in which the poem and its speakers engage with the rhetoric of fear helps to both solidify and complicate the dividing lines of the Christian subject.

Fear, abjection, and holiness are perhaps most graphically demonstrated near the end of the poem, when a broken and bloodied Saint Andrew cries out to Christ, asking why he has suffered such torment. In a response that could serve as a grotesque parody of the sentimental poem "Footprints," Christ tells Andrew to look back at "seolfes swæðe, swa þin swat aget þurh bangebrec blodige stige, lices lælan" [your trail where your blood, through bone-breaking, wounds of the body, has shed a bloody track](1441-3a). When Andrew looks back, he sees "geblowene bearwas standan blædum gehrodene, swa he ær his blod aget" [groves in full

[28] John Hermann, *Allegories of War: Language and Violence in Old English Poetry* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1989), 119. Hermann provides an overview of many typological readings of *Andreas* in his chapter on the poem, 119-49.

blossom standing adorned with flowers, where he had previously shed his blood] (1448-9). Andrew is first transformed by the violence of his persecutors into a gory trace: the sign of his torments stretches out behind him. But through the intervention of divine powers, this trace is transformed into a different kind of sign, a sign of wholeness and renewal.

Such transformations are rooted in abjection. Kristeva identifies the abject with the non-object that lies outside of the recognized order, the expelled object that does not seem to respect the normal rules of the world. Always a transgressor, always a boundary crosser, the abject "lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game."[29] But abjection is on a continuum with the sublime. According to Kristeva, the two are bound up in each other: "through sublimation, I keep [the abject] under control. The abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being … The sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here* as dejects, and *there* as others and sparkling."[30] This moment of the saint's journey, where gory is transformed into glory, is a moment of uncanny doubling, a moment, in Kristeva's words, "of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth."[31] It is this step that leads from the abject to the sublime. In order to examine such transformations, it will be necessary to look at how the rhetoric of *Andreas* attempts to engage with the abject.

In the world of the medieval saint, a world clearly divided into Christian and non-Christian, clean and unclean, one might expect to see the abject identified with the mass of pagans and infidels who persecute the Church's saints. This is certainly the case in *Andreas*, which makes its unbelievers as abject as possible. The Mermedonians, to whom the apostle

[29] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.
[30] ibid., 11-2.
[31] ibid., 9.

Matthew has traveled on a mission of conversion, are bloodthirsty monsters who dine on human flesh: "næs þær hlafes wist werum on þam wonge, ne wæteres drync to bruconne, ah hie blod ond fel, fira flæschmona feorrancumenra, þegon geond þa þeode." [Bread was not their food for the people in that land, nor was water enjoyed for drink, but blood and skin, foreign men's flesh-coverings they partook of around that kingdom]. (21b-25a) The Mermedonians' cruel practices are described in the language of abject horror, dwelling on images of dead bodies and gushing blood. As Kristeva explains, bodily waste, blood, and associated effluvia are among the most powerful markers of the abject, the waste products that "s*how me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live."[32] They draw attention toward that which must be excluded. The cadaver is the ultimate abjection: "the corpse is the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object."[33] Drawing attention to the limit between the living and the dead, the corpse highlights the abject that we turn away from.

The abject land of Mermedonia is littered with corpses and spattered with blood. The Mermedonians themselves are frequently described in terms of blood and gore: "heorugrædig" [blood-greedy] (79), "heorodreorige" [drenched in gore] (996), or "dreore druncne" [drunk with gore] (1003). Perhaps most horrifying is the way in which the Mermedonians carry out their cannibalism, which is not just a dietary aberration, but a systematized practice. After imprisoning foreigners, including the apostle Matthew, the Mermedonians determine which prisoners should come over for dinner: "Hæfdon hie on rune ond on rimcræfte awriten, wælgrædige, wera endestæf hwænne hi to mose metþearfendum on þære werþeeode weroðan sceoldon" [They had written in secret writing and computation, greedy for slaughter, the

[32] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.
[33] ibid., 2-3.

appointed end of men, when they should become food to those lacking meat in their kingdom] (134-7). It is interesting to note the way in which the Mermedonian's menu selection is described: timetables for execution are set "on rune ond on rimcræfte." According to Bosworth-Toller, the element "run" occurs frequently in both prose and poetry with several senses, the common thread being secrecy. Here, the sense "secret writing" (although not necessarily runic writing) seems most appropriate. "Rimcræft," on the other hand, is primarily found in prose sources, including several places where it glosses Latin "arithmetica." [34] The Mermedonian methods of slaughter therefore involve secret counsel and arcane computation, and this is their foray into the realm of rhetoric. As will be discussed in further detail later, the Mermedonians are mostly lacking in direct discourse, as opposed to the characters of Andrew, Christ, and Satan, all of whom engage in vigorous rhetoric. Mermedonian rhetoric takes the form of secretive counsel that leads to brutal action. This can be seen later in the poem, when, following the escape of Matthew, the Mermedonians decide that they must eat one of their own. To decide who this shall be, they turn to divination: "leton him þa betweonum taan wisian hwylcne hira ærest oðrum sceolde to foddurþege feores ongyldan; hluton hellcræftum, hæðengildum teledon betwinum" [They let then among them the lot decide which of them should first forfeit his life to the other for food; they cast lots by hell-craft, with heathen rites reckoned among themselves] (1099-1103). Their ways of deciding are evil in both ends and means, employing hellish methods for hellish goals.

When brought out of the darkness of counsel into the light of day, the language of Mermedonian rhetoric is pain. The language of pain and suffering in *Andreas* also serves an important function in terms of abjection. In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the*

[34] *DOE Web Corpus*. According to the *Corpus*, the two other verse sources are *The Death of Edgar* and *The Menelogium*.

World, Elaine Scarry explains that "physical pain is exceptional in the whole fabric of psychic, somatic, and perceptual states for being the only one that has no object." Unlike other states of being, "pain is not 'of' or 'for' anything – it is itself alone."[35] Being without an object, pain clearly belongs in the realm of the abject, and, like the abject, pain "beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out."[36] Furthermore, according to Scarry, pain resists attempts to put it into language and in fact tends to destroy language altogether.[37] *Andreas*, of course, devotes many lines to portraying bodies that are in pain: the Mermedonian cannibals are brutal monsters who delight in causing pain in others. However, this pain cannot truly be transformed into discourse: if the Mermedonians communicate through a rhetoric of pain, they can only do so by writing it out on the bodies of their victims.

Whereas the Mermedonians are abject monsters whose only discourse is the pain they carve into others' flesh, Andrew is capable of transforming physical pain and violence into the transcendent rhetoric of the sublime. Indeed, the structure of the poem draws attention to the transformation of Andreas. At the beginning, he is portrayed as reluctant to set out on such a dangerous journey: "Ne synt me winas cuðe, eorlas elþeodige, ne þær æniges wat hæleða gehygdo, ne me herestræta ofer cald wæter cuðe sindon." [They are not known friends to me, the men of that strange country, nor do I know anything of the people's mind, nor are the highways over the cold water known to me] (198-201). Andrew's complaint focuses on the unfamiliarity and foreignness of his destination, and the strangeness of their minds. Having just been given an account of their cannibalistic practices, Andrew wants no part of them. In his reluctance to take up this mission from God, Andrew is denying one of the fundamental ways in which the blessed are associated with abjection. The saint is often a person – and a body – that, like the abject,

[35] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford U P, 1985), 161-2
[36] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.
[37] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 4.

transgresses boundaries. According to Peter Brown, the Holy Man, the early Christian archetype of saintliness, was a figure who existed at once inside and outside of society:

> the Holy man was deliberately not human. He was the 'stranger' *par excellence*. …The life of the holy man … is marked by so many histrionic feats of self-mortification that it is easy, at first sight, to miss the deep social significance of asceticism as a long drawn out, solemn ritual of dissociation – of becoming the total stranger.[38]

This ritual estrangement of the Holy Man establishes a place for him that is a non-place, outside of society. His self-mortification is a part of his process of abjection, which solidifies his role as the perpetual outsider. According to Kristeva, "The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing." This tradition of the Holy Man was carried on through such early Christian saints as Anthony, who removed himself completely from society and dwelt in the desert for most of his life. These Desert Fathers in turn became the model for many later saints. That this model of saintly life was still valued in Anglo-Saxon and Post-Conquest England is suggested by the lives of such eremitic saints as Guthlac of Crowland, Mary of Egypt, and Christina of Markyate.

An apostle, such as Matthew or Andrew, is even more of a boundary-crosser. To fulfill Christ's great commission, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19, NIV) the apostle must always be an outsider among a hostile Other. According to Kristeva, "The one by whom the abject exists is thus a *deject*," a persistently wandering stray.[39] This deject "is on a journey … the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the

[38] Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 80-107. 91.
[39] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 6.

pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved."[40]

Andrew is on just such a mission. To fulfill it, Andrew must risk a journey into the heart of an abject and terrifying land. Even if his mission succeeds, his journeying is not necessarily at an end. There will always be more to be saved, necessitating more journeys into heathen lands. Many other stories of the apostles seem to fit this mold. According to Perkins,

> A reading of the *Apocryphal Acts [of the Apostles]* indicates that certain Christians made sense of their world by denying traditional social *nexus*. The *Acts* were rigorously anti-social, unremittingly opting for the dissolution of social categories and relationships. The goal, death, that they presented as a transcendence of human society was, in effect, a repudiation of their contemporary society.[41]

This sort of apostolic dejection can also be clearly seen in *The Fates of the Apostles*, the brief poem appended to *Andreas*. As the title suggests, the poem briefly records the post-resurrection missions of Christ's Twelve Apostles. As they take the gospel to such places as Rome, Asia, India, and Persia, each ultimately finds glory in martyrdom. To cite just one example, we are informed that "Philipus wæs mid Asseum; þannon ece lif þurh rode cwealm ricene gesohte, syððan on galgan in Gearapolim ahangen wæs hildecorðre." [Philip was amid the Asians; from thence he at once sought eternal life by death on the cross, after on the gallows in Hierapolis he was hung by a troop of armed men]. Although this brief martyrology lacks the abject, gruesome details present in *Andreas*, the model of sainthood it presents is clear: a wanderer and a boundary-crosser whose ultimate victory and glory will be death for Christ. Such a path suggests that an apostle will always be an abject wanderer, a persecuted outsider among a host of hostile

[40] ibid., 8.
[41] Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 25-6.

enemies – in the case of Andrew and Matthew, enemies who would make a meal out of the saint; in the case of *Elene,* a Christian knight errant, seeking a holy relic in enemy lands.

The first phase of Andrew's transformation, then, involves his journey from reluctance to resolve as he agrees to head out to hostile lands. As he enters Mermedonia, a stranger in a strange land, he is informed that his mission is not save not only Matthew but the Mermedonians as well: "Manige syndon in þysse mæran byrig, þara þe ðu gehweorfest to heofonleohte þurh minne naman, þeah hie morðres feala in fyrndagum gefremed habban." [There are many in this notorious city who you will turn toward heaven's light through my name, although they have performed many evil deeds in days of old] (973-80). God's promise to Andrew is that his words and deeds will turn "morðor" to "heofonleohte," but such transformative power is only available to one whose body will serve as a model of Christ's suffering: "Is þe guð weotod heardum heoruswengum; scel þin hra dæled wundum weorðan, wættre geliccost faran flode blod." [A struggle is ordained for you of hard sword strokes; wounds shall be dealt to your body, a flood of blood will go forth like water] (951-4). And such a fate is borne out: although granted supernatural abilities that allow him to release the Mermedonians' prisoners, Andrew is handed over to the monsters and tormented, leading to the miraculous transformation of his streams of blood, recounted above.

In addition to the torture inflicted by the Mermedonians, Andrew at this stage undergoes a trial of rhetoric as well, facing off in a battle of words with "se atola gast, wrað wærloga; …helle dioful awerged in witum" [the hateful spirit, the hostile treaty-breaker; …. the devil from hell, damned among torments] (1296-9). The devil has the power of direct discourse seemingly lacking among his Mermedonian allies, exhorting them to violence and challenging the basis for Andrew's own rhetoric: "Þu þe, Andreas, aclæccræftum lange feredes; hwæt, ðu leoda feala

forleolce ond forlærdest!" [You, Andrew, long have practiced evil arts; indeed, you have deceived and misled many men!] (1362-4). He predicts a future of doom and despair for the saint, saying that "Þu scealt werigmod, hean, hroðra leas, hearm þrowigan, sare swyltcwale" [Weary in spirit, humbled, without comforts, you shall suffer harm, grievous pains of death] (1366-8). The Devil's rhetoric is intended to undermine Andrew's ethos before the Mermedonians, but the text transforms this rhetoric: the wandering and torment promised to Andrew are nothing more than what a saint must expect. As discussed above, this is the path of abjection along which a saint travels on his path to the sublime.

Perhaps a little harder to escape are the accusations of "aclæccræftum." The Mermedonians had previously been shown practicing arcane arts, both the "rimcræft" used to select victims and the potions with which they pacify their prisoners. But Andrew has also been involved in magic, with miraculous powers of invisibility and travel granted by God. As Hermann points out, "*Andreas* employs magic politically in several ways." Whereas Mermedonian magic is associated with proscribed sorceries, for Christians, "magic is reconceptualized as miracle or mystery. This semiotic fantasy … invalidates censure; it is criticized only by an unreliable internal audience," such as the evil Devil and the monstrous Mermedonians.[42] Although a reader might see the exploits of Andrew and other saints as being just as fantastic as the magic practiced by their enemies, the accusation reflects back on the accuser: only one as corrupt as the devil could interpret the glorious miracles of Andrew as deceptive arcane arts.

The Devil's challenge ultimately gives Andrew the opportunity to prove his – and by extension, all of Christianity's – rhetoric as superior. Through divine intervention – dismissed by the Devil as deceptive magic – Andrew's body is made impervious to the rhetoric of pain

[42] Herman, *Allegories of War*, 133.

"spoken" by the Mermedonian's. The Devil's accusation are thrown back in his face when Andrew points out that, while the saint may be freed by God at any time, the Devil's own torment is endless: "Đu scealt widan feorh ecan þine yrmðu; þe bið a symble of dæge on dæg drohtaþ strenga." [You shall forever add to your distress; you will for all eternity, day upon day, worsen your condition]. Defeated, the Devil flees. His rhetoric, powered by appeals to fear and full of fearful bombast, is shown to be powerless. Although he is frightening, he himself is full of fear in the face of a superior spiritual and verbal opponent.

The transformation of his blood and the renewal of his body are signs of the saint's transcendence of physical torment; his defeat of the Devil in a battle of words is a sign of his superiority in realms spiritual and rhetorical. Both serve to cement Andrew's transformative power, and Andrew's new, whole body is now capable of bringing order to the hellish, heathen environs of Mermedonia. Carrying on God's mission, Andrew brings just punishment to the wicked Mermedonians. The abjection visited on the saint's body is now visited on the walls of the city, to which Andrew gives orders: "Læt nu of þinum staþole streamas weallan, ea inflede, nu þe ælmihtig hateð, heofona cyning, þæt ðu hrædlice on þis fræte folc forð onsende wæter widrynig to wera cwealme, geofon geotende." [Let streams now spring from your foundation, a river flowing, now that the Almighty, the King of heaven, commands you that you swiftly send forth upon this proud people widespreading water, a gushing flood, to men's destruction" (148). Where there were once rivers of the saint's blood – the promised "wættre geliccost faran flode blod" – there is now the rushing flood of punishing waters.

And yet, just as the torment of the saint is both abjection and glorification, these flood waters are both retribution and salvation. Under the control of the transformed and transformative Andrew, the rhetorical power of the Mermedonians undergoes its own transition.

In the midst of the flood, the people's rhetoric is still inarticulate, but now it is one of the frightened instead of the frightening: "Þær wæs wop wera wide gehyred, earmlic ylda gedræg" [There was widely heard the weeping of men, a miserable outcry of men] (1554-5). Finally, at their lowest moment, the Mermedonians find an eloquent voice, one of contrition as they express their shame at having held the holy men and their desire to turn from their wicked ways. The retributive flood is transformed into the salutary water of baptism. As the people turn from their wicked ways, they turn to their new leader: Andrew. The outsider among monstrous Others now becomes an insider among the new community of believers.

Through the imagery of abjection and pain, *Andreas* depicts many different categories of bodies: the monstrous and the human, the heroic and the holy, the heathen and the Christian, the fragmentary and the incorruptible. At the nexus of this complex web of abjection is the saint's holy, suffering body. Although this body is subject to torment and transgression, its ultimate goal is never in doubt: to become a body of sublime holiness, a sign on Earth of God's glory. Ultimately, *Andreas* demonstrates that in the conception of medieval hagiography, the saint did not achieve glory in spite of the torment he has experienced, but because of it.

It is easy to see how this tale could serve as inspiration. It is also very clearly a tale based on stark lines of inclusion and exclusion, most obviously between the sanctified, purified community of Christ and the terrifying, monstrous community of the Devil, represented by the Mermedonians. It would be easy to dismiss these monsters as a fantastic element of the text; however, as Hermann points out, "in the poem they are regarded as frighteningly real. As we know from the *Marvels of the East*, Anglo-Saxons believed such monstrous, demonic races really existed somewhere out there, at the margins of the world. You could sail there to meet

them, if you were foolhardy enough."[43] Furthermore, Hermann argues, the rhetoric of *Andreas* establishes a link between the Mermedonians and other groups excluded from the sanctified community: "Strategies are for representing Mermedonians in the poem are homologous with the prior institutional model of the Jew. Typological processes that sublate Jewish tradition are reenlisted for the suppression of an alien gentile culture."[44] In establishing these dividing lines, *Andreas* does some rhetorical work supporting important aspects of Christian identity: "Scapegoating allows the other within to be located without, differences within to be rewritten as differences between opposed categories. The ambition of Christianity works through just such textualization of the other, whether Jew or Mermedonian."[45]

In *Andreas*, this exclusion is accomplished primarily through the rhetoric of fear and abjection. At every stage, the enemies of the saint are portrayed as monstrous and terrifying by their very nature. Their practices of cannibalism and sorcery are abominable; their rhetorical champion is the originator of evil itself. Typologically, they are connected to all enemies of the Church everywhere. Their defining characteristic is their otherness: in this, they bring Andrew's saintliness into focus, providing a site for his transformation and transcendence. Andrew is also, in many ways, a fearful, othered outsider: he is a wanderer in an unwelcoming land; his broken body is an image out of nightmares; his powers of destruction are awesome and terrifying. But the rhetoric of fear in *Andreas* portrays the fearfulness of the saint always in opposition to the fearfulness of the more obvious other, in the form of the Mermedonians.

3.4 Confinement and Conversion

Andreas, with its portrayals of monsters and magic, deploys its rhetoric of fear and exclusion with bold and gruesome detail. *Elene*, its hagiographic companion in the Vercelli

[43] Hermann, *Allegories of War*, 121.
[44] ibid., 124.
[45] ibid., 125.

Book, lacks the embodied violence and gore of Andrew's tale, but its rhetorical violence is just as exclusionary, if not more so. As discussed above, *Elene* is a story of discovery and conversion: it recounts the discovery of the mission of Helen (Elene), the Mother of the Emperor Constantine, to seek the True Cross among a recalcitrant people. The poem appears to be adapted from another saint's legend: the *Acta Cyriaci*, or the acts of Cyriac (also known as Quiriac), a bishop of Jerusalem, a converted Jew.[46] This conversion is as much the focus of *Elene* as is Constantine's quest to recover the most holy of relics. Elene oversees the conversion of the elder who most closely guarded the secret of the Cross's location. He is transformed from Judas, who kept his knowledge hidden out of fear of the consequences of it becoming known, into Cyriacus, knowledgeable and word-wise enough to verbally tangle with the Devil himself and emerge victorious. Central to this process of discovery and conversion is the power of speech: its power to compel and to resist, to unite and to divide, to conceal and to reveal.

Elene has received a great deal of attention because of its portrayal of gender and difference. As one of the few Old English poems to focus primarily on a female protagonist, the poem has attracted attention for its seeming subversion of gender roles. Alexandra Olsen argues that Elene, along with Juliana and Judith, were given their hagiographic treatment because they "are active and heroic."[47] It is Elene, not the newly converted Emperor Constantine nor the newly converted Bishop Cyriacus, who wields the most effective rhetorical power in this poem. But Elene moves beyond rhetorical power to physical power: she further subverts the gender rules of the hagiographic genre, even taking on the role of tormentor. As Olsen points out, women in the Germanic tradition "normally use speech rather than action to achieve their

[46] Gradon, *Cynewulf's Elene*, 15.
[47] Alexandra Hennessy Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women: A Reconsideration of *Elene* and *Juliana*," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 223.

purposes, but they resort to action when speech fails."[48] Indeed, the very fact that this poem is called *Elene* is something of a subversion: as discussed above, the poem is an adaptation of the legend of Quiriac, the poem's Judas/Cyriacus. Clair Lees, on the other hand, does not view the poem's protagonist as quite so active. Lees argues that critics are not necessarily correct in identifying her as the poem's true focus; rather, her role is as a link between the Emperor Constantine, the new bishop Cyriacus, and the True Cross. As such, she is "a nexus for the poem's thematic interest."[49] Rather than seeing Elene's portrayal as a subversion of gender roles, Lees asserts that "Elene's gender … , while generically unique, matters very little on the literal level of the poem."[50] Joyce Lionarons presents another reading of Elene's gendered portrayal, one that analyzes the syncretism of the poem's Latin sources and Germanic context. Focusing on gender as performative, Lionaron's explains how Elene's portrayal fulfills and complicates multiple gender roles from multiple contexts.[51]

But at least as much attention has been paid to the poem's problematic depiction of Jews. The Jews, to whom Elene travels in search of the Cross, are the primary antagonists of the poem. They are presented as at best ignorant, benighted unbelievers, and at worst servants of the devil, hiding the Cross from its rightful owners in order to withhold glory from the Church. Some critics have suggested that this portrayal can be viewed as sympathetic, or at least more sympathetic the typical portrayal of Jews in the hagiographic tradition. For example, Robert DiNapoli asserts that the portrayal of the Jews, particularly Judas, highlights the importance of esoteric wisdom and family lore to a much greater extent than earlier versions do, reflective of

[48] ibid., 225.
[49] Claire Lees, "At a Crossroads: Old English and Feminist Criticism." In O'Brien O'Keefe, *Reading Old English Texts*, 160.
[50] ibid., 163.
[51] Joyce Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism and the Construction of Gender in Cynewulf's *Elene*. *Exemplaria* 10 (1998), 2-3.

the native tradition of wisdom poetry such as *Precepts* and *The Order of the World*. According to DiNapoli, this portrayal of the encounter between Jewish wisdom and Christian evangelism could be viewed as reflecting "an imperfectly concealed anxiety arising from an analogous confrontation between a native Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition and the authority of a young Anglo-Saxon church."[52] This is an intriguing argument, and one I wish to explore. However, as DiNapoli presents it, it is based on an awkward elision of the text's clear anti-Semitism. As I suggest, neither the protagonist nor the narrator seems to show much sympathy for the Jews, nor would the audience be expected to feel any. Although DiNapoli repeatedly asserts that the portrayal of the Jews is "strikingly sympathetic," he does not really explain how we are supposed to read sympathy in the threats of destruction against the Jews collectively and the actions of torture and forced conversion against one of them individually.

Indeed, some would claim that the anti-Semitism of the text has been too widely overlooked. Hermann argues that the text's "semiological violence, which makes itself felt in the treatment of the Jews, presents serious problems for the twentieth-century reader, although one would not know this from a survey of *Elene* criticism. In their eagerness to praise the poem and avoid anachronism, critics have even kept silent about its anti-Semitism."[53] The Jews in *Elene* play a similar role to that of the Mermedonians in *Andreas*: hostile, alien Others whose secretive practices threaten the mission of a representative of the Church. By the same token, the anti-Semitism of the text plays a similar role to that of the grotesque, embodied abjection of *Andreas* cannibalism and torture scenes: it is the kernel of the rhetoric of fear that solidifies the harsh divide between insider and outsider.

[52] Robert DiNapoli, "Poesis and Authority: Traces of an Anglo-Saxon *Agon* in Cynewulf's *Elene*." *Neophilologus* 85 (1998), 623.
[53] Hermann, *Allegories of War*, 101-2.

Such attention to Jews in an Anglo-Saxon text may seem oddly ahistorical: During the Anglo-Saxon period, there were no Jews living in England.[54] However, Jews frequently appear in Anglo-Saxon texts. As Andrew Scheill argues in *The Footsteps of Israel*, the Jews portrayed in Anglo-Saxon texts represent "a nexus of rhetorical effects, a variety of representational strategies built into the very structure of medieval Christianity." The topoi suggested by representations of Jews in these texts are complex, from meditative awe at God's divine plan to anger and fear at dark imagery of evil and the body. They were "a vermiform way of fashioning a Christian *populus* in England and continually redefining its nature."[55] In this sense, Jewish characters in Anglo-Saxon texts take up the role of the "virtual Jew" as described by Sylvia Tomasch. Tomasch uses the term in a very different literary/historical context – a discussion of the works of Chaucer – but the rhetorical contexts are very much the same: although Jews were physically absent during Chaucer's time, they were present throughout his and other writers' texts. Just as they do in the Anglo-Saxon period, as described by Scheill, Jews would continue to appear in both positive and deeply negative contexts during the later middle ages.[56] Tomasch, drawing from theories of post-colonialism and cyberspace, coins the term "virtual Jew" in order

> to foreground the condition of historically specific oppression as well as the concominant illusion of liberation from history that is postcolonialism at its most pernicious. 'Virtual Jew' stresses the integral connections between imaginary constructions and actual people, even when they exist only in a fabricated past or a phantasmic future.[57]

The rhetorical power of Jews in Anglo-Saxon texts such as *Elene* is derived from this virtuality: in this liminal space between historical and figural, these characters both confirm and challenge

[54] See Albert Hyamson, *A History of Jews in England*, London: Methuen, 1908, 1-6.
[55] Andrew Scheill, *The Footsteps of Israel*, Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2004, 3.
[56] Sylvia Tomasch, "Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew" in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, New York: Palgrave, 2001, 243-60, 250.
[57] ibid., 252.

English identity. In a saint's legend like *Elene*, such representations gain even greater power as they are filtered through the familiar rhetorical tropes of the genres of hagiography and heroic poetry.

The crucial scene for understanding the rhetorical strategies of *Elene* is the confinement and conversion of Judas, Elene's primary antagonist in her quest to find the cross. The scene, which takes up lines 598-801 of the 1320 line poem, is quite literally the central event of the narrative. This incident has been has been much analyzed, since it is the scene that most clearly subverts the expectations of hagiography, for it is the non-believer who suffers torment at the hands of the blessed. It portrays Elene's final strategy for revealing the knowledge she needs. After cajoling and threatening the Jews multiple times, they finally hand over to her one man who can tell her what she wants to know:

> and þone ænne genam / Iudas to gisle and þa georne bæd / þæt he be ðære rode riht getæhte / þe ær in legere wæs lange bedyrned / and hine seolfne sundor acigde [And then {Elene} took one the one man Judas and then eagerly asked that he should teach the truth about the Cross which was previously long concealed in its resting place, and called him apart on his own]. (599b-603)

This passage demonstrates an essential aspect of the text's overall rhetorical focus: the revealing and concealing of knowledge through the exercise of rhetoric and power. The conflicts of the poem circle around who has access to knowledge, who has the power to uncover it, who has the power to conceal it. Fueling this rhetoric is the text's problematic portrayal of difference: characters' position on the inside or outside can be defined based on their use of and response to fearful rhetoric. By building on well-established oppositions – male versus female, saint versus oppressor, Christian versus heathen – the text tries to establish a rhetorical framework for

understanding the world as a set of clearly defined categories. At the same time, intentionally or not, these dividing lines are sometimes subverted in very telling ways. As in *Andreas*, the rhetoric of fear both confirms and challenges the oppositional categories that the poem seems so dedicated to establishing.

In setting up the conflict between Elene and the Jews, the poem erects the dividing lines that will fuel much of the rhetoric of fear that drives the narrative. As Hermann points out, "the violence of the poem is accompanied by violent exclusions at the level of the sign. These exclusions reinscribe the mythic oppositions of the poem by intensifying contrast, strengthening the slash separating good from good from evil."[58] To serve as a model for holiness, the text needs both saints to emulate and sinners to shun. As I argue above, the text often indicates these divisions through responses to the rhetoric of fear. Elene, as she relentlessly pursues the cross, is defined by her fearlessness and the power of her truth-seeking rhetoric. By contrast, her enemies are defined by their responses to her rhetoric: fear, shame, ignorance, and a covering over of the truth.

Like many Old English narrative poems, *Elene* describes the uses of power: military power, spiritual power, diabolical power, and the power of words. Indeed, it begins with a depiction of martial power: the emperor Constantine, fearful in the face of an invading army of Huns and Hrethgoths, is bolstered by a heavenly messenger who tells him to look to the skies for a sign of glory. Under the sign of the cross he sees in the night sky, he and his army are able to vanquish the enemy. Those familiar with Old English heroic poetry might expect Constantine's military exploits to be the focus of this poem, but they are only the prologue, serving as exposition for the real story: the pursuit of the True Cross. The Emperor's victory leads not to feasting in the hall, but to a convocation of scholars: "Heht þa wigena weard þa wisestan / snude

[58] Hermann, *Allegories of War*, 101.

to sionoðe þa þe snyttro cræft / þurh fyrngewrito gefigen hæfdon, / heoldon higeþancum hæleða rædas" [Then the guardian of warriors called the wisest men quickly into an assembly, those who had learned the knowledge of wisdom through ancient wisdom, held men's counsel in their memories] (153-6). Here, the text turns quickly from the importance of military might – Constantine is "wigenda weard," guardian of warriors – to the power of ancient, arcane knowledge. Constantine, seeking knowledge of his newfound sign of glory, is made aware by his wise men of its nature – the True Cross – as well of its ultimate fate. Possessing this knowledge, he wants to do something about it. So he sends his mother Elene – along with an army of stout soldiers -- to seek its resting place in the Holy Land.

The shift in focus away from Constantine toward Elene could be viewed as a subversion of gender roles, with Elene taking on masculine, militaristic characteristics. But it should be noted that Elene is by no means a free agent: she sets out on this mission because she "ne wolde / þæs siþfates sæne weorðan / ne ðæs wilgifan word gehyrwarn, hiere sylfre suna" [had no wish to prove reluctant over this expedition nor to despise the word of the generous lord, her own son" (219-22). It is Elene on the mission, but it is her son – specifically, her son's words – that set the mission. As Joyce Lionarons points out, any of the "masculine" acts Elene performs "are both part of and constrained by the performance of her normative maternal role."[59] In other words, Elene is only masculinized insofar as she is an agent of her son, whose authority she must respect, thus re-normalizing some potential gender problems of the poem.

Once Elene reaches the holy land, the rhetorical and spiritual battle of wills becomes the poem's primary focus. It is also here that the poem's rhetoric of exclusion and division becomes increasingly troubling. Elene boldly addresses a crowd of Jewish elders in the Holy land, reprimanding them and demanding,

[59] Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism" 5.

Gangaþ nu snude, snyttro geþencaþ

weras wisfæste, wordes cræftige,

þa ðe eowre æ, æðelum cræftige,

on ferhðsefan firmest hæbben þa me soðlice secgan cunnon,

andsware cyðan for eowic forð tacna gehwylces þe ic him to sece

[Go quickly now and think prudently of men of assured wisdom qualified in speaking, men qualified by their virtues, who hold your law foremost in their hearts and who can truthfully tell and make known to me on your behalf the answer to each one of the proofs which I seek from them] (313-9).

Just as her son had done upon receiving the sign of victory, Elene turns to the counsel of wise men possessing ancient knowledge. Already the rhetoric of the text begins defining the dividing lines: Constantine's audience eagerly sought out meaning in the sign and quickly returned an answer, or at the very least another question to pursue. Elene's audience is portrayed as obstinate, fearful, and ignorant. The elders are taken aback by her question and are left "egesan geþreade, gehðum geomre" [tormented with fear, sorrowful with anxiety] (322-3). They seek answers to her questions and accusations among their wise men, but consistently return empty-handed.

Those seeking a philo-Semitic, or perhaps simply a less anti-Semitic interpretation might point to this as vindication for the text: the Jews are portrayed as unaware of any crimes committed by their forbears, to the point that Elene's continued insistence that they think harder and bring back some wiser men seems excessive. An understanding of the Jews' response to Elene's demands is further complicated by the fact that Elene's rhetoric is marked by consistent reference to Jewish wisdom. When she first greets them, it is in terms of great respect:

Ic þæt gearolice ongiten hæbbe

þurg witgena wordgeryno

on Godes bocum þæt ge geardagum

wyrðe wæron wuldorcyninge,

dryhtne dyre and dædhwæte.

[I have understood completely through prophets' mystic sayings in God's book that you, in days of yore, were precious to the King of glory, dear to the Lord and bold in deed]. (288-92)

It is tempting to read this and other passages as attempts to establish in the audience's mind a grudging respect for Jewish lore and law: wrong though they might be about the Messiah, they are invested with a deep store of wisdom, wisdom from which the Church herself had sprung. But there is something else at work here. As Scheill points out, in calling for wiser and wiser Jews, "Elene is setting a trap: she wants to defeat and convert the very wisest representative of the Jews … so that she may show the utter insufficiency of the Old Law."[60] The challenge she issues to her audience intends to reveal their rhetoric and wisdom as ultimately inferior in scope and power to her own, backed as it is by God and Emperor.

The trap is sprung when Judas admits to his brethren that he does have knowledge of what Elene seeks, a knowledge that must be concealed:

Nu is þearf mycel

þæt we fæstlice ferhð staðelien

þæt we þæs morðres meldan ne weorðen

hwær þæt halige trio beheled wurde

æfter wigþræce þylæs toworpen sien

[60] Scheill, *Footsteps of Israel*, 221.

rod fyrngewritu and þa fæderlican

lare forleten.

[The great need now is that we should establish our spirits firmly so that we do not become informants of that murder, or where that holy tree was hidden after the strife, in case the wise ancient record should be overturned and the paternal law be forsaken] (426-32).

Elene, performing her son's masculine authority as emperor, fearlessly demands knowledge. The Jews are portrayed at best as fearful, recalcitrant, and ignorant; at worst – in the case of Judas – they are fearful, recalcitrant, and intentionally concealing knowledge. Judas is the wisest of the Jews, but the text makes it clear that this means he is also the best of them at dissembling and concealing: rather than functioning as Constantine's wise men or his agent, Elene, do, seeking to uncover buried knowledge, Jewish wisdom is portrayed as primarily concerned with concealing knowledge from all seekers. Indeed, according to Judas' report, the very foundation of their law depends on this key piece of information being kept secret.

As much as they attempt to respond to Elene's demands with resistance and concealment, it is clear from the outset they will not be able succeed for long. Elene's rhetoric is more than simply fearless: she is relentless in her zeal, to the point that she herself can become an agent of a fear. If her first speech leaves her audience frightened, it has nothing on the impact of her final threat to the Jewish elders before they hand over Judas:

Ic eow to soðe secgan wille

and þæs in life lige ne wirðeð

gif ge þissum lease leng gefylgað,

mid fæcne gefice, þe me fore standað

þæt eow in beorge bæl fornimeð,

hattost heaðowelma and eower hra bryttað,

lacende lig…

[I truly tell you – and this will be no lie – if you who stand before me persist long with this lie with fraudulent deceit, that you on this hill will be consumed in a pyre of the hottest of fierce flames and leaping flames destroy your bodies] (574-89).

The threat she makes against the elders has clear eschatological overtones, not unlike the homiletics of the end times described in the previous chapter. By invoking this rhetorical trope, Elene places the pursuit of the cross in the context of everyone's salvation: this is not just a matter of punishment for one group's recalcitrance but an implied threat for any who resist the Christian message.

This apocalyptic threat is enough to get Elene the man she wants: Judas, who the elders name as the wisest among them. Her confinement of Judas is one of the strangest and most unsettling passages in a strange and unsettling part of the poem: after interrogating him for a time and finding him still stubborn, Elene commands that he be cast "in drygne seað þær he duguða leas / siomode in sorgum seofon nihta fyrst / under hearmlocan hunger geþreatod, / clommum beclungen" [into a dry pit where he, without company, abode in sorry for a period of seven night, tormented by hunger in prison and clasped by chains] (693-6). It is not the violence of this scene that makes it shocking: indeed, by the standards of hagiographic literature it is relatively tame. As discussed above, and as evident in *Andreas*, severe, embodied violence is an essential part of most medieval saint's lives. What is striking is that, while all of those tormentors were male and pagan, in the case of *Elene* the tormentor is the sainted mother figure. Her performance of this role subverts the conventions of the saints' life genre – the saint becomes the tormentor to a

nascent saint – as well as gender roles. As Lionarons points out, this subversion is normalized insofar as it furthers the binary rhetoric of the poem: "Elene is empowered with the capacity for culturally sanctioned violence not only by her political position as empress in command of the Roman army, but also by her occupation of the textually privileged side of the Christian/Jew binary."[61] By placing rhetoric of fear, confinement, and interrogation into the mouth of a woman, the poem further emphasizes the dichotomy between the saintly and the profane. The sinful, the heretical, the diabolical are not just defeated by the rhetoric of fear, they are defeated by the rhetoric of a woman.

Judas's inability to withstand Elene's treatment of him collapses any claim he might have had to a prior faith and wisdom as strong as what Elene brings. In this way, the rhetoric of the text challenges the conversion narrative of the conventional saint's passion: traditionally, the saint's torment comes after the conversion and tests the saint's resolve. To take one of many examples from Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, in the *passio* of Saint Agnes, edited as LS VII by Skeat, the Christian Agnes is brought before a judge and issued this challenge:

> Ceos þu nu agnes an þæra twegra
> ðe þu mid mædenum þæra mæran uestan
> ne lac geoffrige oððe þu laðum myltestrum
> alt beon geferlæht and fullice gebysmrod
> ða cristenan ne magon þe þonne ahreddan
> [Choose thee now, Agnes, one of these two things; either thou shalt, among the virgins of the mighty Vesta, offer thy sacrifice, or thou shalt be associated with loathly harlots and foully dihonoured, and the Christians will not then be able to deliver thee].

Compare this challenge to the one Elene issues to Judas just before throwing him into the pit:

[61] Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism," (62).

þe synt tu gearu

swa lif swa deað swa þe leofre bið

to geceosanne; cyð ricene nu

hwæt ðu þæs to þinge þafian wille.

[Two things are prepared for you: either life or death, whichever is preferable to you to choose; reveal quickly now which alternative you will consent to]. (605-8)

Like Agatha, Judas must choose between abandoning what his faith tells him to do (concealing the location of the True Cross) and a deeply unpleasant alternative. An audience familiar with the conventions of saints' lives would probably see this ironic reflection. Potentially, this could function as a pathos appeal, making Judas out as the sympathetic character. Indeed, DiNapolli argues that Judas's situation might have even paralleled the audience's own history:

> He stands before her as the representative and guardian of a venerable native tradition whose ancient prerogatives and esoteric approach to the truth are under threat from a new faith arrived, in this instance, from Rome. Put this way, Judas' plight could be taken as a model for the situation of poets in Anglo-Saxon England after the advent of Christianity.[62]

Judas could then be seen as a nostalgic figure of Anglo-Saxon antiquity, struggling with a strange new faith.

But Scheill's point about Elene's seeming praise of Jewish wisdom can perhaps be applied here. Rather than reading Judas's resistance as admirable, a contemporary audience might have interpreted it as both stubbornness and weakness. His refusal to submit comes not from deep resolve in a true faith but in a perverse desire to conceal the truth. As such, his resolve cannot withstand trials as severe as a true saint could. Far from nostalgically praising the deep

[62] DiNapolli, "Poesis and Authority," 623.

well of oral wisdom, the text sets up Judas as an empty suit whose rhetoric is no defense against a superior opponent. Hermann summarizes the poem's overall attitude as follows: "*Elene* embodies the philosophy of torture in all its unsubtle grandeur: your opponents will come around if you punish them enough."[63] I believe that Hermann adequately describes the rhetorical intent of *Elene* with this statement, but there is an additional dimension to the rhetoric of forced conversion. DiNappoli's reading is on to something as well: the relative ease of Judas's conversion threatens in some ways to undermine the very foundations of the rhetorical trope of Christians suffering for their faith. If what Hermann says is truly the attitude of *Elene*'s audience, would they recognize a point at which torture is enough for even a saint to give up conviction?

Whatever contradictions this conversion suggests, the conversion of Judas and his ultimate revelation of the location of the True Cross is perhaps the most important event of the poem in terms of its rhetoric. That his change of heart is sincere is shown in the text through another rhetorical battle of oppositions. This time, the enemy is no lesser being than the Devil himself, upset that his diabolical kingdom will be lessened now that the cross has been uncovered. As in *Andreas*, this Devil's attacks come in the form of rhetorical bombast: unlike the elders or Judas, his rhetoric does more than simply resist and conceal. The starting point for his harangue is "fyrngeflit" [ancient strife] between himself and mankind. As Hermann points out, this concept is frequently referenced in Old English literature about Satan, alluding to the pre-historical struggle between God and Lucifer. As such, the reference to this strife "inscribes present spiritual conflict within a panoramic time span. Because it originates 'outside' time, it can be represented as taking place everywhere within it."[64] The transhistorical scope of this strife

[63] Hermann, *Allegories of War*, 118.
[64] Hermann, *Allegories of War*, 39.

in the Devil's rhetoric forges a link between the rebellion against God, the crucifixion and resurrection, and the discovery of the Cross. The Devil further emphasizes the extra-temporal nature of his rhetoric by invoking the persecution of saints with prophetic threats:

> ic awecce wið ðe
> oðerne cynign se ehteð þin
> and he forlæteð lare þine
> and manþeawum minum folgaþ
> ond þec þonne sendeð in þa sweartestan
> and þa wyrrestan witebrogan
> þæt ðu sarum forsoht wiðsæces fæste
> þone ahangnan cyning þam ðu hyrdest ær
> [I shall awaken against you another king who will persecute you, and he will leave your instruction and follow my sinful custom, and you then he will send into the blackest and most evil terrible punishments so that you, afflicted by pains, will quickly renounce the crucified King whom once you obeyed] (926-33).

Graddon's edition notes that the "oðerne cynign" predicted by the devil is likely Julian the Apostate, the Emperor who oversaw the martyrdom of Judas /Cyriac and who is associated with the persecution of many early Christian saints. As argued above, this model of martyrdom is mirrored in the confinement that Judas endures, but with roles reversed. In explicitly referencing this kind of persecution, the devil brings to the surface some of what is implied in Judas' conversion: that, under the penalty of enough pain, anyone could renounce anything.

To force such questions out of the audience's mind requires a Judas who is an entirely new creation, removed from role of guardian of secret knowledge. After the devil's speech,

Him ða gleawhydig Iudas oncwæð,
hæleð hildedeor -- him wæs Halig Gast
befolen fæste, fyrhat lufu,
weallende gewitt, þurh Wigan snyttro –
and þæt word gecwæð wisdoms ful
[To him then the wise Judas spoke, a warrior bold in battle – in him was the Holy spirit firmly bestowed, love hot as fire, fervent in understanding, through the Holy Spirit's wisdom – and spoke these words wisely]

Whereas the old Judas is wise only in the ways and laws of the Jews – and therefore, in the logic of the text's anti-Judaic rhetoric, spiritually blind – Judas's wisdom is now fully endowed by the Holy Spirit and combined with emotional fire. This is what fuels his response to the fearful rhetoric of the Devil. Judas actual rebuttal to the Devil throws the threats of torment back at him: it is he who, accursed by God and confined to hell, shall "wergðu dreogan, / yrmðu butan ende" [suffer damnation, misery without end] (951-2). Elene is impressed not just with his faith, but with his rhetorical skill, his "snyttro, / hu he swa geleafful, on swa lytlum fæce -- / and swa uncyðig – æfre wurde, / gleawnesse þurhgoten" [wisdom, how he became so faithful, in so little time – and from such ignorance -- ever became endued with such wisdom] (958-61). Judas – soon to be baptized and reborn as Cyriacus – has undergone complete transformation: he may now not only resist the rhetoric of fear, but use it, and his knowledge, offensively.

This would be a wonderful place to end were it not for the lingering discomfort of this transformation story: the text's hateful anti-Semitism lingers. As Lionarons explains,

> For a modern reader unused to reading saints' lives, Elene's cruelty can be justified only by assenting to the text's anti-Semitic assumptions; resistance to those assumptions places the reader in the position of sympathizing with Judas against the saint. When Judas finally submits and converts, the reader's crisis intensifies rather than eases: to acquiesce in the new religious equilibrium realigns one's sympathies with the text, but draws one even further into anti-Semitism; to resist longer than Judas is to be forced to read against the grain for the rest of the poem.[65]

Such objections can similarly be raised about *Andreas*: although the Mermedonians themselves could be dismissed as nothing more than fantastical monsters, the poem also references Jews in ways that are just as negative as the portrayal of unconverted Jews in *Elene* – indeed, in ways that are just as negative as *Andreas*'s portrayal of the Mermedonians. In any case, as discussed above, the rhetoric of fear is harshly divisive. Every attempt is made to ensure that no sympathy can be felt for the suffering of the Mermedonians, as such sympathies would force readers to "read against the grain."

reading against the grain in this way is the most profitable way to read these texts. The anti-Semitism and divisiveness of the *Andreas* and *Elene* cannot be dismissed or explained away. Any talk of judging or excusing the Anglo-Saxons is ultimately meaningless: who would be there to hear the verdict? With a resistant reading of the text, rather than accepting the cultural assumptions of the texts, we can interrogate those assumptions and the oppositions that underlie them.

[65] Lionarons, "Cultural Syncretism," 64.

This thing all things devours;
Birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel;
Grinds hard stones to meal;
Slays king, ruins town,
And beats high mountains down

Poor Bilbo sat in the dark thinking of all the horrible names of all the giants and ogres he had ever heard told of in tales, but not one of them had done all these things. He had a feeling that the answer was quite different and that he ought to know of it, but he could not think of it. He began to get frightened, and that is bad for thinking.

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

CHAPTER 4

BROKEN TO PIECES: RIDDLES, WRITING, AND THE RHETORIC OF FEAR

4.1 Riddles in the Dark

In the famous riddle game of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, the protagonist Bilbo is forced to compete in a riddle challenge with the loathsome and cunning creature Gollum. Gollum's final riddle describes something that would destroy all things. Bilbo, focusing on the terror of the riddle, misses the point of it entirely and is only saved by accident when he cries out for more "time" – which happens to be the answer. Gollum's riddle confounds Bilbo because he can focus only on its mask of terror, destruction, and monstrosity. The fear it inspires ends up short-circuiting Bilbo's ability to see through the misleading but accurate clues that would add up to the solution that Bilbo himself knows must be something simple. The scene is effective at capturing some of the existential terror that is perhaps inherent in the riddle as a form. Riddles challenge their audience to reconfigure their worldview in unsettling ways. They describe monsters that the audience knows can only be something uncannily familiar. By means of carefully crafted rhetoric, riddles disguise the everyday in terms of the bizarre.

Tolkien, a scholar of the Middle Ages, was familiar with many riddling traditions of the ancient and medieval world, including the Old English riddles of the Exeter book. In this

collection of ninety-odd (the number varies according to editorial practices, and some of them are very odd indeed), riddles can be found employing a similar technique to Gollum's "time" riddle. Here are five lines of one such text, as translated freely by Craig Williamson:

> The culminant lord of victories, Christ,
> Created me for battle. Often I burn
> Countless living creatures on middle-earth,
> Treat them to terror though I touch them not,
> When my lord rouses me to wage war.[1]

What kind of fire-breathing monster has the Messiah loosed on the world? Is this a beast from the Apocalypse? Although no answer is provided in the manuscript for this or any of the other riddles, a canny riddle solver should be able to look past the mask of monstrosity and see the sun. Other monsters of the Exeter book are not so easy to see through, as is the case with this puzzler:

> Wiht cwom gongan þær weras sæton
> monige on mæðle, mode snottre;
> hæfde an eage ond earan twa,
> ond twegen fet, twelf hund heafda,
> hrycg on wombe ond honda twa,
> earmas ond eaxle, anne sweoran
> ond sidan twa. Saga hwæt hio hatte.

[1] Craig Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures:Anglo-Saxon Riddle Songs* (London: Scolar, 1983) 64. Williamson, in this edition of translations as well as in his Old English edition, edits this as riddle number 4; in the more commonly referenced numbering of Krapp and Dobbie in *ASPR*, it is number 6. The differences in numbering will be discussed in greater depth below.

> [A creature came walking where many men sat in assembly, wise of spirit; it had one eye and two ears and two feet, twelve hundred heads, back and belly and two hands, arms and shoulders, one neck and two sides. Say what it is called].[2]

If you guessed "A one-eyed garlic seller," you are probably familiar with a similar Latin riddle by Symphosius, of which this text is believed to be an adaptation. Without the Latin source, it is doubtful anyone would be able to solve this riddle.[3] Although the Latin riddle is certainly the inspiration for the Old English one, they are quite different texts. Symphosius lays out the enigma in three fairly simple lines: "Step up and see what you won't believe: / A one-eyed man with a thousand heads. / He sells what he has. Can he buy what he lacks?"[4] By contrast, the Old English text catalogues all of the features you would expect a creature to have – arms, shoulders, ears, and so on – throwing in the minor detail of the twelve hundred head almost as an aside. Instead of constructing a wondrous creature in the mind of the audience, the rhetoric of this riddle disassembles a normal body, rearranging the details into a gory assemblage of body parts.[5]

Not all of the Exeter riddles employ fearful rhetoric, but all of them occupy a world that is quite baffling and unnerving: "how are we to understand," asks Robert DiNapolli, "the imagination of writers who construct such highly wrought and complex literary artifacts whose 'solution' may turn out to be a stunningly prosaic item like a set of keys or a jug?"[6] Following the skillful (il)logic of a riddle requires an interpretative framework other than the one in which we expect the world to operate. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault famously cites Jorge

[2] Except where otherwise noticed, the text of the Exeter riddles is taken from Williamson's edition and the translations are my own. Riddles will be referred to by their numbering in *ASPR*.
[3] Williamson, *The Old English Riddles*, 376-7.
[4] Williamson, *A Feast of Creatures*, 213.
[5] This is similar to a contemporary children's anti-riddle: Q: What has two humps, lives in the desert, and sings like a canary? A: A camel; I added that third part to make it harder.
[6] Robert DiNapoli, "In the Kingdom of the Blind, The One-Eyed Man is a Seller of Garlic: Depth-Perception and the Poet's Perspective in the Exeter Book Riddles," *English Studies* 81 (2000) 422-55, 422.

Luis Borges's description of "a certain Chinese Encyclopaedia" that divides animals into the categories

> a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.[7]

According to Foucault, "the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that.*"[8] A riddle does not only demand that we think "*that*," but demands that we identify something that exists in all of these categories at once. A riddle operates with a logical sense of its own, and demands that we enter into that system, however confounding it may be.

Although critical work on the Exeter riddles tends to focus on finding and refining solutions to the trickier riddles, it seems clear that there is more to the riddle than the "what." Often, the "how" of the riddle – the logical system that breaks down the boundaries between the everyday and the utterly bizarre – is even more perplexing and intriguing. This "how" frequently takes the form of an extended metaphor, what Patrick Murphy calls the riddle's "focus." According to Murphy, "an Old English riddle's proposition … may at times not relate only to an unnamed solution but also to what I call its 'focus,' an underlying metaphor that lends coherence to the text's strategy of obfuscation."[9] This metaphoric focus is at the heart of the riddles' engagement with rhetoric, including fearful rhetoric. A number of the riddles appear to play with metaphors related to fearful topoi such as torture, dismemberment, destruction, and monstrosity. As the discussion of the previous chapters has no doubt shown, none of these topics are

[7] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xv.
[8] ibid., xv
[9] Murphy, *Unriddling*, 18

unexpected in Anglo-Saxon literature, and it makes sense that rhetoric related to divine judgment or the torments of saints would be fearful. The riddles are a case of their own. Why should fearful rhetoric be employed to describe something as beautiful as an ornate gospel book (in riddle 26) or something so prosaic as plow (riddle 21)? For that matter, almost everything about the riddles' rhetoric defies a simple explanation. Why should a badger[10] (riddle 15) be considered heroic or an onion (riddle 25) sexy? Why would a reed pen (riddle 60) provide a first-person account of its life? Why should an inkhorn (riddles 88 and 93) be nostalgic for its former life on the head of a stag? The rhetoric of the Exeter Riddles, particularly as expressed through their choice of metaphorical focus, is something of a riddle in and of itself. What is perhaps most surprising about the rhetoric of the riddles is the extent to which it relies on the instability and uncertainty of language, particularly written language. Although the Old English riddles, like all other Anglo-Saxon texts, are bound up in the traditions of the early-medieval world, the rhetoric of riddling tends to undermine the stabilities on which these traditions rely. In this chapter, I wish to examine how this is reflected in the metaphorical focus of riddling texts. Through their focus, many of the Exeter riddles engage with fearful rhetoric in ways that comment on reading, writing, and rhetoric as practiced in Anglo-Saxon England.

4.2 Riddling Contexts

The Exeter Riddles are found in the tenth-century manuscript known as the *Exeter Book*, the largest of the four Old English poetic codices. In addition to the riddles, the Exeter Book includes such well-known poems as the so-called elegies, including *Deor*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Wife's Lament*; the poetic lives of saints Guthlac and Juliana; and a number of

[1010] Or possibly a fox; see Niles, *Old English Elegiac Poems*, 144-5 n.4.

other, mostly religious poems.[11] Although the text of the manuscript is well-preserved for the most part, the beginning and the end have suffered severe damage: folios are missing from the beginning and the first surviving folio is marked with cuts and stains. The back folios have suffered severe burn damage, with unknown folios completely lost and several marred by a diagonal gash that has obscured and/or obliterated the text of many poems. The riddles occur in roughly the last third of the manuscript, in three groups: 1-59, a slightly different version of riddle 30 followed by riddle 60, and riddles 61-95. Between these three groupings can be found other, presumably unrelated poems are found. It is not entirely clear why the riddles are arranged in such a way, but according to Bernard Muir, this arrangement suggests that the second and third groupings were "added merely because they happened to turn up after the intervening texts had already been copied out." However, Muir goes on to note that the additional riddles seem to have been included to complete one hundred, or a "century" of riddles.[12] It is indeed possible that additional folios containing a few riddles to round out the set were lost or destroyed altogether. Furthermore, the poems that occur between Riddles 60 and 61, *The Husband's Message* and *The Ruin*, are both descriptive, enigmatic poems that include runes, characteristics which may have misled the scribe/anthologist of the Exeter Book into thinking these were riddles.[13] As chance would have it, the second and third groupings of riddles occur in the section of the manuscript that has suffered the worst damage.

As a result, many of the riddles in the third group are partially damaged beyond reconstruction. Due to this damage, the lack of titles in the manuscript, and the inconsistent

[11] The *Exeter Book* is edited as Volume III of the *ASPR* by George Phillip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (New York, Columbia 1936) and by Bernard Muir as *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, (Exeter, U of Exeter P 1994). It is available in a facsimile edition by R. W. Chambers, Max Förster, and Robin Flower (London, P. Lund 1933). The facsimile version is invaluable as it shows both how well preserved and how irrevocably damaged this manuscript is.
[12] Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, 23.
[13] Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, 25-6

usage of large capitals to mark the beginnings of poems, there is considerable critical disagreement over the boundaries of individual riddles. For example, the text found on folios 101v-102v appears in the *Anglo Saxon Poetic Records* and Muir edition of the Exeter Book as riddles 1-3; other editors, such as Trautmann and Williamson, view this as a single riddle. Other riddles, particularly the fragmentary ones of the third grouping, are arranged together in a variety of ways, giving rise to multiple systems of numbering. Krapp and Dobbie's numbering being the most common system, I will employ that.

Of course, the number and numbering of the riddles is just one of a number of critical controversies surrounding the Exeter Riddles. Indeed, these texts have as long and as complex a critical history as any other texts in the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus. After Benjamin Thorpe's transcription and edition of the Exeter Book first made the texts in it available to the modern scholastic community in 1842, scholars began to study the riddles seriously, with much of this scholarship focused on attempts to provide the answers that the Exeter scribe neglected to include in the manuscript. Scholars continue researching, refining, and refuting the solutions to these texts. In Niles' *The Old English Enigmatic Poems*, he not only offers new or revised solutions to several riddles, but also takes the ambitious step of providing a near-comprehensive set of answers to the Exeter Riddles in their native tongue.[14]

Where a riddle has proved to be particularly inscrutable and its answers most controversial, this is generally due to one or a combination of three main factors. The first of these is the state of the texts themselves. Damage to the manuscript has left some texts as little more than fragments. It is difficult enough to edit these fragments into discrete riddles, let alone translate and interpret them in a way that makes sense. Secondly, even in riddles that have escaped physical damage, textual difficulties abound. As with much of Old English poetry, the

[14] Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 141-8.

practice of copying poems by hand into manuscript has resulted in the loss or alteration of words in several places. In addition to apparent errors in scribal transmission, many of the riddles employ cryptographic techniques such as runic letters, anagrams, and other verbal tricks that have confounded modern editors and solvers. For example, riddle 36 includes a line that reads, as edited by Muir, "monn .h.w.M. wiif. m.x.l.kf wf. hors. qxxs." (line 5). A footnote describes the line as "intrusive, encrypted and defective," and states that it "is probably meant to read *monn homo wiif mulier hors equus*." [15]Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, many of the riddles resist solution because of the irreconcilable differences between our own world and the world of the Anglo-Saxons that they describe. We – that is to say, contemporary Anglo-Saxonists – are not the intended audience for these poems. We approach all Anglo-Saxon texts as unintended readers, and this disconnect between text and audience takes on special relevance in the context of riddling. To cite a modern example, think about a simple children's riddle like "What has four wheels and flies?" Getting the answer (a garbage truck) depends on a number of cultural and linguistic constraints, from the use of large trucks – which, ironically, usually have more than four wheels -- to haul away garbage to the double meaning of the word "flies" as both a present tense verb and a plural noun.

The art of riddling is rooted in diverse sources, including folk traditions and Latin rhetoric, and the Old English riddles of the Exeter book are indebted in different ways to both. The best documented sources tradition for the Old English riddles is the Latin tradition of *enigmata*. According to Andy Orchard, about a dozen surviving Anglo-Saxon manuscripts contain collections of riddles. Latin *enigmata* were composed by a variety of well-known Anglo-Saxons, including Tatwine, Boniface, Aldhelm, and Alcuin; the tradition of Anglo-Latin riddling "can be traced to that late seventh century, when Aldhelm adapted the form from the Late Latin

[15] Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, 310 n. 5.

poet Symphosius."[16] According to Kennedy, two of the Exeter riddles (35 and 40) are adaptations from Aldhelm, and three (47, 85, and 86) are adapted from Symphosius.[17] Several other Exeter riddles show the influence of Latin *enigmata* indirectly. For example, Orchard demonstrates how Riddle 65, the second "onion" riddle of the collection employs the rhetorical device of polyptoton – grammatical variation of the same repeated word – in much the same way as Symphosius's *Enigma 45*, also an onion.[18]

More than just a literary form, Latin *enigmata* had their basis in rhetorical forms. "Enigma" as a rhetorical term can be traced back to Greek rhetoric. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses riddles in the context of metaphor: "From good riddling it is generally possible to derive appropriate metaphors; for metaphors are made like riddles; thus, clearly, [a metaphor from a good riddle] is an apt transference of words."[19] By the time Augustine began his attempts to adapt Classical rhetoric to Christian purposes, the *enigma* was a widely recognized rhetorical trope. However, according to Eleanor Cook, it was viewed by many classical rhetoricians as "a small matter, a conundrum or perhaps some obscure wording."[20] Although Cicero, Quintillian, and Donatus all discuss enigma as a trope, they seem to view it as something more important to poetry. Following Aristotle, they connect it to metaphor and allegory, and usually accompany it with warnings against excessive obfuscation.[21] Augustine, by contrast, "crucially connected small tropes of enigma with larger enigmas, notably biblical ones."[22] Augustine refers to enigma only cursorily in *On Christian Doctrine*, in an explanation of the importance of tropes: "And not

[16] Andy Orchard, "Enigma Variation: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle Tradition," in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe and Andy Orchard, (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005), 284.
[17] Williamson, *The Old English Riddles*, 24.
[18] Orchard, "Enigma Variations," 296.
[19] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 224
[20] Eleanor Cook, "The Figure of Enigma: Rhetoric, History, Poetry," *Rhetorica* 19, no 4 (2001): 355.
[21] ibid. 357-60.
[22] ibid., 356.

only examples of all of these tropes are found in reading the sacred books, but also the names of some of them, like *allegoria, aenigma, parabola*."[23] According to Cook, Augustine treats the trope of enigma most fully in *Of the Trinity*, when he explicates I Corinthians 13:12 "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." As Cook points out, the Vulgate text of the portion of the verse now translated "darkly" was "in aenigmata." For Augustine, a knowledge of rhetorical tropes such as enigma was necessary to truly understand the scriptures.[24]

In addition to adapting or translating Latin enigmata, the Exeter riddles show other evidence of rhetorically-minded composition. According to Marie Nelson, "the skill that [the Exeter Book riddlers] exhibited in their double task of revealing and concealing may have been derived from their knowledge of classical rhetoric." Nelson cites a number of rhetorical tropes employed in the riddles, such as metaphor, anaphorae, and prosopopoeaia, devices that might have been drawn from a knowledge of Classical rhetoric.[25] Prosopoeaia, the rhetorical device of giving a voice to a rhetorical object, is perhaps the most prominently featured rhetorical device of the learned riddling tradition; according to Orchard, Aldhelm identifies the entire enigmatic genre with this particular rhetorical device, and all of his *enigmata* employ it.[26] In the Exeter riddle, the device is employed in the riddles that employ a first-person persona, in which a creature or object describes itself, usually in human terms.[27]

Much has been made of the divide between the Latin-influenced literary riddle and the riddles that appear to be derived from oral tradition. As Orchard points out, these categories are often treated rather reductively, with the former portrayed as "a handful of churchmen describing

[23] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr., Upper Saddle River: Prentice, 1958, 103.
[24] Cook, "The Figure of Enigma," 349-50.
[25] Nelson, "Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles," 424-5.
[26] Orchard, "Enigma Variations," 292.
[27] Williamson divides the Exeter riddles into two groups: those in which objects describe themselves, usually beginning "Ic eom" or "Ic wæs," and those in which an outside observer describes the object, often beginning with "Ic seah." See Williamson, *The Old English Riddles*, 26.

largely classroom-topics, and diffusing the whole element of challenge by providing the answer first," and the later as "ruder (in every sense of the word) …, portraying everyday items in unusual ways, and perhaps intended less for the classroom than for the wine-hall."[28] However, focusing solely on either the oral or literate influences of the Exeter riddles will never tell more than half the story. Recent critics seem for the most part to focus on the fuzzy boundary between the two categories of riddles, the literary and the folk riddle. According to Murphy, the Exeter riddles can most profitably be read "as artful and allusive responses to traditional forms of riddling, as well as to Latin enigmatography."[29]

These texts should be viewed in light of the complex and diverse tradition of enigmatic texts originating in the Late Antique and early medieval world. At the same time, they are uniquely Anglo-Saxon texts, crafted from the amalgam of Latin and Germanic influences that is a trademark of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The influence of Latin learning can be seen in the adaptation of Latin enigmas, the use of rhetorical techniques, and the explicitly Christian content of the riddles. At the same time, the riddles are firmly grounded in the traditional vernacular poetry of the Anglo-Saxons, showing signs of oral-formulaic composition. Anita R. Riedinger argues that "the pervasive 'formulaic style' of the riddles is a key element in their misleading accuracy."[30] Even in a riddle that is modeled closely on a Latin original, such as Riddle 35, Riedinger identifies a number of recognizable traditional formulas.[31] With roots in the often contradictory worlds of Latin learning and Germanic tradition, riddles emerge to challenge the complex world of Anglo-Saxon literary culture.

[28] Orchard, "Enigma Variations," 284.
[29] Murphy, *Unriddling,* 18.
[30] Riedinger "Formulaic Style," 30.
[31] ibid., 31.

The context of these riddles, inasmuch as we can understand it, offers some suggestion of their rhetorical role. In their manuscript context, they are edited together as a group, albeit imperfectly, indicating that they are intended to be read together; the fact that they are included in a manuscript containing primarily religious and wisdom poetry suggests that these texts might have been viewed as having some didactic purpose for their audience. What we can surmise about their composition tells us that these texts, like much of Old English poetry, represent the influence of the Latin literary tradition filtered through the lens of Germanic oral tradition. As my discussion of several writing-related riddles shows, the interaction of these traditions can become a part of the riddle itself: employing rhetoric that can be both playful and terrifying, the riddles comment on language and literacy in order to conceal and reveal.

4.3 Riddles and Writing

Although no answer to any of the Exeter riddles can be offered with absolute certainty, it is clear from the conventionally accepted answers that the corpus describes a diverse catalogue of items. Several of these relate specifically to the realm of language. As Shook points out, the Exeter riddles, like their Latin analogues, "continue to show interest in the scriptorium and in the tools of writing."[32] These riddles would include numbers 26 (Gospel Book), 47 (bookworm), 51 (pen and fingers), 60 (reed-pen), 67 (Bible), and the pair of 88 and 93 (both inkhorns), sticking solely to riddles with generally agreed-upon solutions. To this we might also add 57, which Murphy solves as "letters,"[33] and 95, solved by Williamson – along with Murphy – as "book."[34] It is not surprising that several riddles would refer to reading and writing; the composers of the

[32] Laurence Shook, "Riddles Relating to the Anglo-Saxon Scriptorium," in *Essays in Honour of Anton Charles Pegis*, ed. J. Reginald O'Donnel. 219.
[33] Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 84.
[34] Williamson, *The Old English Riddles*, 397; Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 87. The concept of a body of riddles devoted to the tools of the scriptorium is discussed by Shook, "Riddles Relating to the Anglo-Saxon Scriptorium." Of the riddles to be discussed in this chapter, Shook only addresses 26, 51, and 57, which Shook solves as "musical notes." Shook also proposes scriptorium-related solutions to several other riddles, such as 17, 18, 19, 49, and 64. These solutions, however, have not been widely accepted.

riddles and the compiler of the Exeter book would probably have been more familiar with inkhorns, pens, bibles, and book-destroying pests than they would have with swords and shields. Perhaps more surprising is the attitude toward the craft of writing expressed in these texts. According to DiNapoli, the riddles "never refer to the physical act of writing without a certain ambivalence of vocabulary and tone."[35] I would argue that this ambivalence itself serves as a riddling technique: a rhetorical mask that substitutes the uncertainty and ambiguity of language for the stability of the written word.

I would like to begin my discussion with an examination of a riddle that has not typically been associated with writing, Riddle 57. The text of the riddle is as follows:

> Ðeos lyft byreð lytle wihte
> ofer beorghleoþa þa sind blace swiþe,
> swearte, salopade. Sanges rope
> heapum ferað, hlude cirmað;
> treadað bearonæssas, hwilum burgsalo
> niþþa bearna. Nemnað hy sylfe.
>
> [The air carries little creatures over the hillsides which are very black, dark, dark-coated. Bountiful of song, they travel in bands, crying loudly; they tread the woody headlands, sometimes the city houses of the sons of men. They name themselves].

This is an example of a riddle whose answer is agreed upon in general, but whose specific solution is very much in doubt. Krapp and Dobbie argue that of all the proposed answers, "only those which involve birds are worthy of consideration." Furthermore, the closing line of the riddle "would suggest a species with an onomatopoetic name."[36] There are a number of birds that

[35] DiNapoli, "In the Kingdom of the Blind," 424.
[36] Krapp and Dobbie, *ASPR III*, 351.

might fit the description, depending on how strictly or loosely the solver applies the requirements: the birds should be small, dark, loud, traveling in flocks, found in both the wood and the city, and named after their own call. Proposed solutions have included jackdaws, swallows, and crows, along with other non-avian fliers such as bees and gnats.[37] However, as Murphy points out, the text is quite dissimilar from the other bird riddles, "which tend to emphasize the oddball features of a given species."[38] As mentioned previously, Murphy departs from the typical solution to this riddle: taking up a proposal made by Shook, "musical notes," Murphy suggests a solution of "the letters of the alphabet, Latin *litterae* (or *bocstafas* in the Old English tonue)."[39] According to Murphy, this answer makes sense given "the strong riddling associations between birds and writing in Anglo-Saxon England."[40] The logic of Murphy's solution is based primarily on the three properties associated with letters in the tradition of Latin grammar: their name, shape, and sound value. Different parts of the riddle emphasize each of the three properties: their sound, carried on the air (line 1); their form as written on the page (2b-3a) and their name (line 6b).[41]

What is most interesting about Murphy's solution is not that it departs so radically from an entrenched solving tradition, but the attitude towards the written and spoken word that this solution implies. If letters can be metaphorically conceived of as flocks of noisy birds flitting here and there, how can any verbal expression – itself a gathering of these noisy birds – have any sort of stability and permanence? This attitude toward the written and spoken word seems borne out in several of the Exeter riddles that encode their answer through unusual word-play. The

[37] For a summary of solutions, seek Krapp and Dobbie, *ASPR III*, 351; Murphy, 80-84; Niles 128-30; and Williamson, 307-9.
[38] Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 82.
[39] ibid., 84.
[40] ibid., 91.
[41] ibid., 96-7.

most basic of these is 23, which announces in its opening line "Agob is min noma eft onhwyrfed" ["Agob" is my name turned around backwards]. The gibberish word "agob" can quickly be transformed into the riddle's answer, "boga" [bow]. Other riddles disguise their answers with a jumble of runes, such as riddle 24, whose runes can be rearranged to spell the Old English word for "magpie," "higoræ." Riddle 42 takes this further by forcing the solver to turn everyday words – the runes' names – imagine their forms written out "on flette" [on the floor] – their written forms -- then rearrange those runes – that is, their sound values -- to spell out the answer, "hana ond hæn" [cock and hen]. Lerer points out that this riddle, along with others in the collection, depend on "the heightened attention it directs toward writing itself, and on the structures of paradox, ambiguity, and self-reference framing that attention."[42] The ambiguity and paradox of riddles with a literary focus relies to a great extent on a central paradox of *littera*: the fact that they exist, according to Murphy, "at once as (silent) physical mark and as audible speech sound."[43]

This attitude toward letters is also captured in Latin texts important to the medieval world. For example, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* explains that letters were "invented for the memory of things. For lest they fly into oblivion, they are bound by letters. Indeed, in so great a variety of affairs, everything could not be learned by hearing nor held in memory."[44] As O'Brien O'Keefe explains, "Isidore comprehends writing visually as a technology of memory, despite retaining an aural notion of world. Letters owe their existence to the need to aid memory, for neither hearing nor memory is sufficient to take in the great variety of things."[45] If we go along with Murphy and accept these birds as letters, it seems clear that this and similar riddles play

[42] Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, 117.
[43] Murphy, *Unriddling the Exeter Riddles*, 96.
[44] qtd. in O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song*, 51 nt. 12.
[45] ibid., 52.

around the shady border between orality and literacy in Anglo-Saxon literary culture. As discussed in previous chapters, this liminal space between the oral and written spheres of literary production can and does serve as the locus for rhetorical anxieties in Old English. Let us examine how this anxiety plays out in the rhetoric of fear employed by the riddles.

The remainder of my discussion focuses on several riddles concerning the technology of writing, beginning with the pair of "Inkhorn" riddles -- 88 and 93 -- found near the end of the collection. Both have suffered fairly substantial losses of text, but what remains is clear enough. The two texts differ from each other in terms of specific details, but they share the same focus: the first-person narrator once wandered far and wide with companions, but is now fixed in place and filled with black liquid. Specifically, what is described is one antler from a stag, hollowed out and used as an inkwell.[46] This pair, like several other first-person implement riddles, highlights the origins of an object, inscribing it into a pseudo-heroic narrative. In the case of the two ink-horn riddles, the closest heroic analogue may be the so-called elegiac poems of the Exeter manuscript, discussed in the following chapter. Just as in the elegies, the rhetorical force of the text is fueled by a contrast between the perceived joys of the past and the continual disappointment of present. In Riddle 88, much of the emphasis is placed on the relationship between the speaker and his brother – the other antler on the stag's head. But now, the two are separated:

Nis min broþor her,
ac ic sceal broþorleas bordes on ende
staþol weardian, stondan fæste;
ne wat hwær min broþor on wera æhtum

[46] Niles proposes "heortes horn" [hart's horn] for riddle 88 and "blæc-horn" [inkhorn] for riddle 93, arguing that more emphasis is placed on the object's prior life as part of a pair in the former. See *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 148, n. 26.

eorþan sceata eardian sceal,

se me ær be healfe heah eardade.

[My brother is not here, but I shall, brother-less, guard the foundation in the board's end, stand fast; I do not know where on the surface of the earth my brother shall abide in the possession of men, he that previously dwelled high by my side]. (20b-25)

Riddle 93 employs similarly nostalgic rhetoric, this time yearning for past service to a lord, as indicated by "frea min" in the fragmentary first line. Both speakers emphasize the destruction that was wrought in the scriptorium. In Riddle 88, "Nu mec unsceafta innan slitað, wyrdaþ mec be wombe; ic gewendad ne mæg." [Now monsters {literally, "uncreation"} slit my insides, harm me in the belly, I may not escape]. (29-30). Riddle 93 expresses this in more gruesome detail:

Siþþan mec isern innanweardne

brun bennade; blod ut ne com,

heolfor of hreþre, þeah mec heard bite

stiðecg style. No ic þa stunde bemearn,

ne for wunde weop, ne wrecan meahte

on wigan feore wonnsceaft mine,

ac ic aglæca ealle þolige

[Afterwards, gleaming iron weapons wounded me inside; blood did not come out, gore from the bosom, although hard-edged steel bit me hard. Nor did I lament the moment, nor weep for the wound, nor might I avenge my misfortune on the life of a warrior, but I endured all misery] (17-23).

The concept of describing an object's creation in terms of torture and punishment is well-attested in folk-riddling tradition; as a riddle type it is recorded by Archer Taylor as number 678.[47] It is further attested, according to O'Brien O'Keefe, in riddles from the Anglo-Latin tradition, and indeed, she asserts that these "images of violence … are to the best of my knowledge an English contribution to the Latin *enigma* tradition."[48] Like the narrator of *The Wanderer*, the antler-exile-inkhorn cannot even mourn for his injuries. Indeed, one could say that his voice has been appropriated: instead of crying out in mourning or vengeance, it has become the voice for another. Perhaps the most striking reference to voice/voiceless paradox in the riddle comes in the form of another paradox: although the inkhorn is wounded, it does not bleed. The injury to the inkhorn lacks both the audible and visual signs associated with wounding. The emphasis on this negative detail draws attention to what does well out of the antler, namely the ink that allows the riddler to give voice to the voiceless antler. The emphasis on this negative detail draws attention to what does well out of the antler, namely the ink that allows the riddler to give voice to the voiceless antler. Just as the visual sign of the letter appears to both supplant and supplement the spoken and remembered word, black ink replaces the expected sign of welling blood.

This ambiguous connection between silence and speech can also be seen in a riddle whose subject may be closely connected to the inkhorn, Riddle 60. The poem begins with the riddle object describing its origins : "Ic wæs be sonde sæwealle neah / æt merefaroþe; minum gewunade / frumstaþole fæst. [I was at the shore, near the sea-wall at the water's edge, stood fast in my place of origin" (1-3a). After emphasizing its remote origins, the object goes on to describe the uses to which it will be put, that it will "ofer meodubence muðleas sprecan, / wordum wrixlan [mouth-less speak over the mead-benches, weave words]" (9-10a). The means

[47] "A Series of Tortures or Punishments Describing a Manufactured Object." Archer Taylor, *English Riddles from the Oral Tradition* (Berkley, U of California P, 1951), 247.
[48] O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song*, 54.

by which this is achieved are a mystery, a wonder "þam þe swylc ne conn, / hu mec sæxes ord on seo swiþre hond, / eorles ingeþonc ond ord somod / þingum geþydan [to those who know not how dagger point and the skilled hand, man's ingenuity and the point together, pressed me for this purpose]" (11b-14a). The speaker's ultimate purpose? That it should "for unc anum twam ærendspræce / abeodan bealdlice, swa hit beorna ma, / uncre wordcwidas, widdor ne mænden [boldly announce a message for we two alone, so that more men would not widely relate our words]" (15-17). Like any good riddle, the object's description of itself is clear in some places, obscure in others, and contradictory everywhere. In its original form, it is a variety of sea-side plant, the most likely candidate being some sort of reed. From its origins as a plant, it is crafted by human hands into some sort of implement. Much less clear is the purpose of this crafting. Although it speaks, it is mouthless. Although it is available to all who gather at the mead-bench, its secrets are only known by those with sufficient understanding. By the same token, although it speaks "boldly," it conveys its message in secret, closed off from the wider world of men. The most commonly accepted answers are "reed pen" or "reed flute," although some, seeing a connection between this text and *The Husband's Message* which follows it, believe it refers to a rune-stick. Niles suggests the answer "hreod," [reed], which could refer to the reed-plant described in the riddle's opening or to something crafted from it, whether pen or flute.[49]

Although the specifics of the answer may be up for debate, the reference to the privacy of its message, along with the motif of the mouthless speaker – attested in Old English and Latin sources[50] -- suggests a clear connection to writing. As O'Brien O'Keefe explains,

> The use of mouthless speakers, dead lifegivers, dumb knowledge-bearers, clipped pinions – all metaphors of loss – reflect an Anglo-Saxon understanding that speech itself is not a

[49] Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 132.
[50] Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 319.

> *thing*, but that writing, as it alienates speech from speaker, transforms living words into things. The technology which preserves also kills."[51]

The primary difference between the reed-pen and the inkwell is the attitude that the riddler expresses toward the process of writing. Unlike the "inkhorn" riddles, which emphasize the horror of creation and the isolation of the riddling objects, Riddle 60 celebrates the creative skill associated with the pen and its ability to join separated people through secretive communication. But like the inkhorns, the reed of Riddle 60 is a rootless wanderer, transported from familiar surroundings to a strange world, put into service by others. As such, it could serve as a stand-in for the written word itself. As Lerer points out,

> The concept of the absent writer and the necessary separation of the author and the work was a subject of learned speculation for a variety of medieval cultures emerging into literacy. … [L]iterate communities soon recognized that writing grants the possiblitities of speaking with the distant and the dead. The simple fact that texts outlive their makers, or that letters can be sent over long distances, provokes an author's awareness that an audience exists outside the narrow confines of his or her time and place.[52]

Pen and ink are thus instruments through which a new way of understanding words is created: as a text that can be disseminated outward from an absent author. The Exeter riddles approach this concept with certain ambivalence. While Riddle 60 does not engage directly with the rhetoric of fear, their central metaphors engage with the mutability and mobility of language, and their rhetoric seems to reflect certain anxieties about this. The message of the reed-pen is both open to all hearers over the mead bench and reserved for secrets, not to be shared with other listeners.

[51] O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song*, 54.
[52] Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, 86.

The anxieties about language and writing reflected in the riddles discussed above can be further explored in riddles related to the store of literacy, the manuscript book. The last two riddles I examine describe two sides of the same leaf, as it were: Riddle 26, usually solved as "Bible," and Riddle 47, usually solved as "Bookworm." Neither of these solutions is particularly controversial, nor are the riddles themselves particularly challenging. The former begins with a harrowing description of destruction:

> Mec feonda sum feore besnyþede,
> woruldstrenga binom, wætte siþþan,
> dyfde on wætre, dyde eft þonan,
> sette on sunnan, þær ic swiþe beleas
> herum þam þe ic hæfde. Hærd mec siþþan
> Snað seaxses ecg, sindrum begrunden;
> fingras feoldan, ond mec fugles wyn
> geondsprengde speddropum spyrede geneahhe
> ofer brunne brerd, beamtelge swealg,
> [An enemy deprived me of life, stripped away my earthly strength, then soaked me, immersed in water, took me out afterward, set me in the sun, where I was totally deprived of the hairs which I had. Then the hard edge of the knife cut me, ground me with cinders; fingers folded me, and the joy of a bird made tracks sprinkled with useful drops in abundance, over the broad rim swallowed wood-ink…]

The text goes on to describe the ornate decoration of the object, then, in a series of comparative adjectives describes its benefits to all people. In a twist on the conventional riddle-challenge to "say my name," the object commands

Frige hwæt ic hatte,

niþum to nytte. Nama min is mære,

hæleþum gifre ond halig sylf.

[Learn what I am called, beneficial to the afflicted. My name is excellent, useful to men and holy itself]

The series of misfortunes which begins the riddle will seem not so unusual to anyone familiar with Anglo-Saxon bookmaking. The object in question is most certainly some sort of book; the description of the decoration and the benefits of the book suggest that it is a particularly important one. Although some earlier critics have suggested that the riddle could refer to books in general, the fact that the object names itself as holy makes it clear that a Bible of some sort must be intended.[53] Niles clarifies this further, pointing out that the most exquisitely decorated religious books of the period would be copies of Gospel Books. He proffers the solution "*Cristes boc*," or "Gospel Book" in modern English.[54]

Like the "inkhorn" riddles, Riddle 26 makes heavy use at its start of the rhetorical device of prosopopoiea. But while the "inkhorn" riddles primarily narrate the objects' past lives as living creatures, and only briefly (albeit graphically) recount the torture of their transformation, the creation of the book is the primary focus. This disguise of torture, however, also acts as a clue: the tortures brought to bear on the book in this riddle suggest those experienced by Christ in his Passion. This transference of Christ's pain to an inanimate object expressed through prosopopoiea is reminiscent of the well-known Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, in which The Cross is at once adorned and mutilated:

Geseah ic wuldres treow

[53] Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 212.
[54] Niles, "Old English Enigmatic Poems," 118-9.

wædum geweorðode, wynnum scinan,

gegyred mid golde; gimmas hæfdon

bewrigene weorðlice Wealdendes treow.

Hwæðre ic þurh þæt gold ongytan meahte

earmra ærgewin, þæt hit ærest ongan

swætan on þa swiðran healfe.

[I saw a wondrous tree adorned with clothing, shining with joy, adorned with gold; gems had covered worthily the Lord's tree. Yet through that gold I could perceive wretched former strife, that it first began to bleed from the right side]. (14b-20a)

Like the Gospel Book, inkhorns, and reed pen of the Exeter riddles, the cross in *The Dream of the Rood* is given voice to tell of its origins:

Þæt wæs geara iu (ic þæt gyta geman)

þæt ic wæs aheawen holtes on ende,

astyred of stefne minum. Genaman me ðær strange feondas,

geworhton him þær to wæfersyne, heton me heora wergas hebban.

[That was years ago (I that yet remember) that I was hewn from the edge of the forest, removed from my roots. Strong enemies seized me from there, they brought me there to spectacle, commanded me to hoist criminals] (28-31).

Were it not specifically identified as a vision of the cross, this would make a good riddle.[55] In *Dream*, the enigmatic qualities direct the listener to contemplate the mystery of Christ's

[55] Martin Irvine explores the links between *The Dream of the Rood* and the trope of enigma in "Anglo-Saxon Literary Theory Exemplified in Old English Poems: Interpreting the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene*," in O'Brien O'Keefe, *Old English Shorter Poems*, 31-63. Peter Orton compares *The Dream of the Rood* to several of the Exeter riddles in "The Technique of Object-Personification in *The Dream of the Rood* and a Comparison with the Old English *Riddles*," *Leeds Studies in English*, ns:11 (1980): 1-18; however, Orton does not include riddle 26 in his discussion.

sacrifice; Riddle 26 uses similar tactics in its verbal destruction and construction of a written document. In describing the torments of the animal hide that will become the pages, the riddle invites the audience to share in the sacrifice that is scratched onto it, a sacrifice that will benefit those who make rightful use of it:

> hy beoð þy gesundran ond þy sigefæstran
> heortum þy hwætran ond þy hygebliþran,
> ferþe þy frodran, habbaþ freonda þy ma,
> swæsra ond gesibbra, soþra ond godra,
> tilra ond getreowra, þa hyra tyr ond ead
> estum ycað ond hy arstafum
> lissum bilecgað ond hi lufan fæþmum
> fæste clyppað.
>
> [they will be safer and more victorious, the heart be braver and more glad, the spirit be wiser, have more friends of the dear and familiar, true and good, useful and faithful, then their fame and prosperity will increase with gladness and grace will cover them with mercy and the embraces of love will hold them fast]. (19-26).

The object's suffering are not only transformed into benefits for the reader, but also adornment for itself, with the riddle drawing special attention to the gold leaf and red dye that adorn the Gospel book. This focus on the physicality of the book demonstrates the importance of the world of the book to the Anglo-Saxon world. As Lerer points out, "The layout of the page, the organization of the codex, and the binding of the book contribute to the impression of the written

artifact as a universe of its own."[56] By tracing the path from death and destruction to inscription and adornment, Riddle 26 invites the reader into the universe of the book.

Riddle 47 is thematically related to Riddle 26, although it begins with the finished product, then proceeds to destruction:

> Moðde word fræt. Me þæt þuhte
> wrætlicu wyrd, þa ic þæt wundor gefrægn,
> þæt se wyrm forswealg wera gied sumes,
> þeof in þystro, þrymfæsne cwide
> ond þæs strangan staþol. Stælgiest ne wæs
> wihte þe gleawra, þe he þam wordum swealg.
> [A moth ate words. To me that seemed
> a wondrous fate, when I that wonder discovered,
> that the worm swallowed some of a man's songs,
> the thief in darkness, his glorious speech
> and its strong foundation[57]. The thievish guest was not
> a whit the wiser for the words swallowed].

Although an intriguing piece of writing, this text is a bit of a failure as a riddle. As Robinson points out, "it seems embarrassingly unproblematic. Since it begins and ends by stating the answer to the riddle …, it appears to be no riddle at all."[58] The implied question is, "what do you call a moth that eats words?" The answer, "a bookworm."

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[56] Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, 7.

[57] [57] Alternately, lines 4b and 5a could be translated "the glorious song and the strong man's foundation," a reading preferred by Niles that influences his discussion of the riddle's double solution, as discussed later. See Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 286; Muir *Exeter Book* 647; and Niles *The Old English Enigmatic poems* 121.

[58] Fred Robinson, "Artful Ambiguities in the Old English 'Book-Moth' Riddle," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (South Bend: Notre Dame U P, 1975), 356.

But what is a bookworm? The word "bookworm" is, as Niles points out, "a modern word that has no OE equivalent."[59] Such creatures were, however, known to antiquity and the Middle Ages, as is evidenced by the like source of Riddle 47, Symphosius's Enigma 16, "Tinea."[60] The OED provides two definitions for the term. Literally, it is "a kind of maggot which destroys books by eating through the leaves;" figuratively, it is "one who seems to find his chief sustenance in reading, one who is always poring over books." In this case, the figurative sense appears to precede the literal, with the earliest citations being 1601 and 1855 respectively. The literal sense of the word is quite non-specific, as many larval pests would gladly make a meal of books. Field ecologist John V. Richardson, Jr., maintains an online list of "The Most Common Insect Pests of Paper in Archives, Libraries, and Museums," which includes beetles, booklice, cockroaches, moths, silverfish and firebrats, spiders, and termites.[61] The riddler may or may not have had any particular monster in mind, but there is a limit to the number of possible culprits, based on what vermin infested medieval English monasteries and feasted on the books there, which were, after all, not paper but vellum – as is viscerally demonstrated in Riddle 26. As Niles points out, larval moths do not eat organic material, such as the vellum used in book construction. Rather, the creature, Niles argues, is actually "a *maða*, a common OE noun denoting a 'maggot' or 'grub'" (121).[62] Moreover, like Sampson's riddle in the book of Judges, this one requires a double answer about an eater and something eaten. Niles proposes that the maggot's meal is actually a copy of the Psalter, one of the most important books in the domain of Anglo-Saxon clerical education. Furthermore, this answer fits Niles's translation of "þæs strangan staþol" as "the foundation of the strong," the Psalter being the primary text for the

[59] Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 121.
[60] Robinson, "Artful Ambiguities," 361-2.
[61] John V. Richardson, "The Most Common Insect Pests of Paper in Archives, Libraries, and Museums," last modified 15 December 2010, http://jvrichardsonjr.net/insects/pests.htm
[62] Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 121.

education of clergy, and his preference for translating "þæs strangan" as "the strong one's" as a reference to the psalmist David. Therefore, Niles proposes that the complete answer to this riddle should be "*maða ond sealm-boc* 'maggot and Psalter.'"[63]

Lacking a true challenge in terms of its solution, the enigma of this text lies elsewhere. As Williamson points out, the description that opens the text is actually a "double disguise:" not a moth but a worm, not [spoken] words, but a book.[64] Furthermore, as Robinson notes, the text appears to pun on certain ambiguous words. For instance, "swealg," [swallow] "staþol," [foundation] and "þystro" [darkness] are commonly used not just in their literal senses but also in relation to learning; furthermore, "cwide" [speech] could pun on "cwidu" [that which is chewed].[65] Taken in another sense, these elements could suggest another solution: what takes in (swallows) the foundation of knowledge in ignorance (darkness)? Perhaps it could be solved as "an unsuccessful scholar."[66] Indeed, the Latin original of the poem, cited by Robinson, seems to emphasize this aspect: "Writing has fed me, and I don't even know what writing is. I have lived among books, and yet I am no more learned thereby. I have devoured the Muses, and yet thus far I have not profited from it."[67] Like mouthlessness and destruction, ignorance is a common trope of *scriptorium* riddles;[68] here the ignorance is seemingly transferred from the store of knowledge to the consumer of that knowledge, perhaps a wrong reader.

The creature is also described as a "wyrm," a word usually translated with its modern English descendant "worm." In Old English, the word has a broader range of meanings, covering just about any sort of crawling or serpentine creature; figuratively, this could mean "wretched

[63] ibid., 121-2.
[64] Williamson, *Old English Riddles*,
[65] Robinson, "Artful Ambiguities," 357-8.
[66] ibid., 359.
[67] qtd. in Robinson, "Artful Ambiguities," 362.
[68] O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song*, 53.

creature," as in the Old English versions of Psalm 21:7.[69] On the other end of the spectrum, "wyrm" can refer to something so large and destructive as Beowulf's dragon. Niles points out, perhaps facetiously, that a dragon could meet the riddle's suggestion that the *wyrm* in question is also a flying creature – a *moððe* – but that "context would seem to rule out that solution."[70] It is worth considering, however, that the double meaning is intentional. Like a dragon, the book-*wyrm* is a thoughtless destroyer that derives no benefit from that which he acquires. Furthermore, the act of identifying the tiny, burrowing maggot with the monstrous dragon seems to fit well into the absurdist, topsy-turvy worldview that characterizes many of the Exeter Riddles. The "wyrm" in Old English has another destructive capacity as well: it eats the dead. According to Victoria Thompson, in Anglo-Saxon discussions of death, decomposition "is almost always expressed entirely in terms of being eaten by *wyrmas* [worms or serpents] or other animals, with the internally generated processes of decay apparently causing much less interest."[71] In this sense, "wyrm" can serve as a grim pun, pointing to the fate of all flesh, to become food for worms. It reminds the audience that the "staþol" of the book is nothing but dead matter; only the words therein could provide any sustenance of value.

Just as the riddle suggests a double answer – both worm and book – the loss expressed is a double loss: that of the valuable vellum manuscript and the irreplaceable words it contained. By extension, this is a loss of an entire body of words, perhaps an entire technique of composition. In this case, the true destroyer is not the bookworm but the scribe. The riddle seems to suggest that, rather than preserving them, the act of transcribing the important songs of men into a manuscript places them at risk of loss and destruction. This anxiety about the written word has been noticed by many critics of Riddle 47. Williamson characterizes this poem as "an implied

[69] ibid., 359. If Niles is correct in identifying the eaten manuscript as a psalm book, this would be a peculiar irony.
[70] Niles, *The Old English Enigmatic Poems*, 120 n. 4.
[71] Victoria Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England*. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 138.

lament for things past" that is concerned with "the mutability of songs as they pass from the traditional *wordhord* of the *scop* into the newer and strangely susceptible form of literate *memoria.*"[72] He restates this position more passionately in *A Feast of Creatures*, saying that the riddle laments that "The old form of memory, the rhythmical word-hoard, has given way to the material storehouse of the vellum page. What the mind of the singer guarded and passed on, the book makes plain and perishable."[73] DiNapoli argues that this riddle poses "a strikingly modern conundrum about the fragility of the written word," a conundrum heightened by "the context of a culture negotiating the competing claims of an ancient and vanishing oral tradition and an upstart but dominant lettered one."[74] There seems to be a consensus among critics that this poem reflects nostalgia for the pre-Christian mode of oral-formulaic composition, perhaps a desire for a return to a pre-Cædmonic era of Germanic poetry.

However, if Niles' revised answer to riddle 47 is to be accepted, the reader should keep in mind that the book that the bookworm has devoured is not a collection of Germanic songs but a Psalter used in Christian education. Even putting aside Niles's "Psalter" solution, what we know about Anglo-Saxon manuscript collections would suggest that a bookworm would find far more Christian texts than Germanic songs to eat. The Christian orientation of this poem is emphasized by the specific reference to the creature in the first line as a "moððe." The moth has a special biblical significance, acknowledged in Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven … For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." According to the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*, the word "moððe" occurs outside of

[72] Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, 285.
[73] Williamnson, *Feast of Creatures*, 193.
[74] DiNapoli, "In the Kingdom of the Blind," 427.

this riddle and glosses[75] only in gospel translations or homilies related to this particular scripture. In this light, the riddle can be seen as reflecting pessimistically on the practice of piling up the treasure-hoard of God's words in earthly libraries, where they are subject to the depredations of thoughtless creatures and careless men. Indeed, the present state of the Exeter book itself is a testament to this.

This is not to deny the riddle's nostalgia for the passing of an oral tradition, but I would argue that this riddle lends itself to a specifically Christian interpretation as well. The conundrum that DiNapoli refers to as "strikingly modern" is also strikingly medieval and Christian, particularly in its emphasis on the transience of all material things. In particular, the idea of eating words doesn't seem so strange in the context of rhetorical and religious treatises that discuss religious contemplation in terms ingestion. According to John Scattergood, writers from Philo to Jerome to Ambrose to Augustine were particularly interested in rumination as a metaphor for learning and memory. Augustine in particular saw eating and reading as analogous: "one fed the body, the other the spirit."[76] The Exeter bookworm is not just a wrong eater/reader, but an actual thief and destroyer of words. Not only does he ruminate on words and benefit from them not at all, he leaves behind empty, wordless places. Although it cannot destroy the words themselves – the spoken words will remain in the memory of those who have studied the texts – it destroys the foundation of those words, "the cues which enable them to be recalled in the memory and re-presented."[77] In other words, the bookworm has taken away a key feature of the *bocstafas* perhaps described in Riddle 57: their physical, visual, shape on the manuscript page.

[75] The Latin word glossed by "moððe" is actually "tinea," the solution to Symphosius's enigma.
[76] John Scattergood, "Eating the Book: Riddle 47 and Memory," in *Text and Gloss: Studies in Insular Learning and Literature*, ed. Helen O'Briain et. al (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999), 122
[77] ibid., 126.

Far from being simply a capricious description of a vermin with a taste for precious manuscripts, Riddle 47 can be read as a nexus of conflicting ideas about the nature of the word, particularly of the holy word. It draws attention to words as both spoken and written, stored in the treasure troves of both the scops' word-hoards and the librarian's scriptoria, eternal and transient, physical and spiritual. In doing so, this riddle draws attention to the uncertainty associated with language, literacy, and rhetoric. Frequently, the more a text attempts to ignore this uncertainty, the more it drifts to the surface. This can be seen in all of the riddles discussed above: riddles about pens and inkhorns draw attention to the written word as a mouthless speaker, at once silent and ever speaking; at once present anywhere and removed from its originator. Along with them, the riddles attempt to emphasize the holy and worthwhile content of the manuscripts while employing fearful rhetoric that emphasizes the physicality of the object itself. In these riddles, reading and writing dwell in a realm of paradox, which the reader may respond to with both fascination and horror. But in a riddle, this paradox itself becomes a tool for the riddle: as it conceals, it reveals. Through the rhetoric of fear, riddles use the ambiguities and uncertainties of language as both a mask and a message. This becomes all the more powerful when the riddles take on reading, writing, and rhetoric as their subject. The very anxiety these subjects induce becomes a rhetorical mask to hide their true nature. Like Bilbo in the dark, we as the audience can only hope that we do not become so caught up in the mask of fear that we ignore the simple solution hiding behind it.

CHAPTER 5

Alone in the Wilderness: Fear, Antithesis, and Consolation in the Old English Elegies[1]

5.1 A Bird in the Hall

In Book 2, chapter 13 of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, an account is given of the conversion of the Northumbrian king Edwin. Crucial to this conversion is testimony given him by a counselor:

> When we compare the present life of man on earth with that time of which we have no knowledge, it seems to me like the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting-hall where you are sitting at dinner on a winter's day with your thegns and counselors. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside, the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside, he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which he came. Even so, man appears on earth for a little while; but of what went before this life or of what follows, we know nothing. Therefore, if this new teaching has brought any more certain knowledge, it seems only right that we should follow it.[2]

In this analogy, a human life is a warm, welcoming place, but one open on either end to the hostile, unknown conditions of life beyond death. It emphasizes how quickly life can turn from comfort and familiarity to chaos and torment. As such, this passage

[1] Portions of this chapter are adapted from my thesis, *The Hall of Elegies*, U of Texas at Arlington, 2005.
[2] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 129-30.

employs a topos common to much of Anglo-Saxon literature, that of the transience of human life.

Readers do not need to look far to find this topos in Old English poetry, and several poems have garnered much attention for their focus on the temporary nature of our existence: A lament of a lord-less exile, wandering the earth. A man recounting his hardships on the sea. Verses employing an uncharacteristic rhyming pattern, recounting the rise and fall of a man's fortunes. The consolatory lament of a *scop*, recounting episodes from myth and history. A short but deeply enigmatic poem of mourning. A penitential prayer that turns to an exile's lament. A bitter lament of an exiled woman. A hopeful message between two separated people. A description of an ancient city, on a manuscript page ruined beyond reconstruction. Found scattered throughout a single manuscript – the Exeter Book[3], these are considered by some to constitute a distinct category: the elegy.

As I discuss more fully below, the notion of an elegiac genre is problematic. However, I believe that many of these poems can profitably read alongside each other, paying attention to particular rhetorical strategies that they employ. Many of these strategies deal with a central antithesis of permanence and transience, as does Bede's account of the bird in the hall: on the one hand, life is sweet and warm within this space of life he describes. But within many Old English poems, particularly those categorized as elegies, the speaker is the bird that has flown back into the storm: the audience is asked to dwell on the transience of worldly goods, worldly companions, and this life in

[3] This manuscript is discussed fully in the preceding chapter.

the world. Reading these texts, one gets the sense that the Anglo-Saxons expected the world to be a fearful place, one in which no constancy could be expected but change, in which individuals stood alone against powerful, uncaring forces of nature, time, and fate. At the same time, the elegies are capable of turning this transience to hope, turning, as the narrator of *The Seafarer* says, from "þis deade lif, læne on londe" [this dead life, transitory on land] (65b-66a) to eternal life with God. In many places, these poems seem to console their audience by turning their thoughts toward transcendence and eternity. These two rhetorical moves – transience and consolation – suggest some very different ways of reading these texts, which could be read as either complaints about the brevity and terror of life or as consolation and comfort in spite of such a life. My reading of these texts is that the two moves are not separate: yes, the elegies console, but they also brood, mourn, terrify, and curse, often within the same rhetorical movement. The elegies of the Exeter Book speak with a polyvocalic rhetoric that directs its audience to contemplate both complaint and consolation.

At the heart of this ambivalent rhetoric is often a rhetorical contemplation of oppositions or antitheses. The power and inevitability of nature is contrasted with the powerlessness of human nature. The journey of life is contrasted with the finality and stillness of death. The life of the hall and faithful companions is contrasted to the bondless life of an exile. The permanence of the world to come is contrasted with the transience of life on Earth. The elegies offer no clear or easy resolutions to these antitheses, leaving the audience to contemplate them in fear. In this chapter, I will explore the rhetorical links among these poems, focusing on the fearful rhetoric that

surrounds the central contrast between transience and permanence. Although the poems attempt to draw their audience toward contemplation of the hope and promise of eternity, the antithetical rhetoric draws the speaker and the reader back and back to our own transient world.

5.2 The Elegy as Category

On folio 115A of the tenth-century poetic codex known as the Exeter Book[4] is a poem – known now as "The Wife's Lament" -- beginning "Ic þis giedd wrece bi me ful geormorre, minre sylfre sið. Ic þæt secgan mæg, hwæt ic yrmþa gebad, siþþan ic up weox, niwes oþþe ealdes, no ma þonne nu" [I sing this lament about myself full of mourning, of my own experience. I may say that what I have endured of misery since I grew up, recently or of old, no more than now].[5] In 1826, when William Conybeare published an edition of his brother John Josias's translations of Old English poetry as *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, he might have missed the feminine endings on "geormorre" and "minre sylfre," but he picked up on the lachrymose rhetoric of the poem. In his arrangement of all extant Old English poems by genre, he included this one (titled "The Exile's Lament") along with "many of the *Metres of Boethius*" as "elegiac poetry." Over the years, critics combing the Exeter Book discovered more poems similar in theme and content to Conybeare's "Exile's Lament" – which came to be known as *The Wife's Lament*: Debates about this categorization continue to this day, as critics have proposed and rejected the idea of an elegiac genre of Old English poetry.

[4] Facsimiles of the folios containing the elegies are reproduced in Anne Klinck, *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's U P 1992).
[5] Except where otherwise noted, quotations from poetry are from Krapp and Dobbie; the translations are my own.

Nine (or ten; see footnote on *Resignation*) poems, all from the *Exeter Book*, are now typically included in this "genre:" *The Wanderer, The Seafarer, The Riming Poem, Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament, Resignation*[6]*, The Husband's Message,* and *The Ruin*. The most commonly cited definition of the elegy as a type of Old English poem is that of Stanley Greenfield in *Continuations and Beginnings*: "a relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation and expressing an attitude toward the experience."[7] Although this does accurately describe all of the poems in the group, it is a fairly vague definition and one that would not differentiate any of these poems from, for example, *The Dream of the Rood*. Greenfield himself seems to have backed away from this definition, arguing later that they constitute a genre "by force of our present, rather than determinate historical, perspective; that is, by our 'feel' for them as a group possessing certain features in common."[8] Other recent critics have seen reason to interpret the poems as a genre. According to Anne Klinck, in order to posit "elegy" as a meaningful category of Old English poetry, critics "should be able to demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxon 'elegists' intended to produce poems of a particular sort, even if such poems are never explicitly classified by them."[9] Klinck attempts to do so in her critical edition, establishing thematic, linguistic, and stylistic

[6] Alan Bliss and Allen Frantzen, in "The Integrity of *Resignation*," *The Review of English Studies* 27 (1976), 385-402, argue that a leaf is missing between lines 69 and 70 of *Resignation* and that the poem is actually two fragments. Many critics have accepted this conclusion, although Klinck maintains the poems integrity. See Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 28-9 and 193.
[7] Stanley Greenfield, "The Old English Elegies," in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* ed. E. G. Stanley (London, Nelson 1966), 142.
[8] Stanley Greenfield, *Interpretations of Old English Poems,* (Routledge, London 1972), 135.
[9] Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 223.

connections between and among the texts and analogues in Latin, Old Welsh, and Old Icelandic.

Other critics have been less eager to accept the notion of a genre of elegiac poetry. B. J. Timmer, writing in 1942, rejected the notion of an elegiac genre in favor of an "elegiac mood" common to several of the poems in the set. This mood, emerging from the fact that "melancholy forms a fundamental element of the Germanic character," owes its prominence to its "adaptation … to Christian propagandistic purposes."[10] More recent critics have rejected the idea of the genre as anachronistic. Maria Mora claims that "the [Old English elegiac] genre is a Romantic construct. Both the generic concept and the canon are essentially 19th century fabrications."[11] Fulk and Cain seem to agree with this assessment, connecting the genre to the sensibilities of "Victorians of a Romantic disposition"[12] and arguing that "the term 'elegy' contributes to ahistorical and ethnocentric misconceptions about these poems," which frequently show more affinity with texts outside the grouping than texts within.[13] Indeed, it might be more profitable to read these poems in relationship with texts outside the category of elegy. According to Tom Shippey, at least a few of these poems, notably *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, are similar in many ways to wisdom literature, such as *The Order of the World*, *Precepts*, and *Maxims*.[14] *Wulf and Eadwacer* , *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*, which have in the past been associated with riddles, show

[10] B.J. Timmer, " The Elegiac Mood in Old English Poetry," *English Studies* 24 (1949): 44.
[11] Maria Mora, "The Invention of the Old English Elegy," *English Studies* 76 (1995): 138.
[12] Fulk and Cain, *History of Old English*, 180
[13] ibid, 181
[14] Tom Shippey, "*The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as Wisdom Poetry," in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. Henk Aertsen and Rolf Bremmer, Jr., (Amsterdam: VU UP, 1994), 145-58.

affinities with enigmatic texts.[15] According to Fulk and Cain, grouping these texts together as the elegiac genre "only serves the purpose of seeming to justify the lavish critical attention bestowed upon them, to the neglect of many other poems mixed together with them in the Exeter Book."[16]

Indeed, the elegies – a problematic term that I will nevertheless continue to employ, if only for convenience – are among the most popular poems in Old English, outside of *Beowulf*.[17] There are many reasons for their continued popularity, beyond the sentimentality of Anglo-Saxonists. First, they are relatively short; the longest among them, *The Seafarer*, at 124 lines is a fraction of the 668-line *The Phoenix* or the 731-line *Juliana*, both found in the Exeter Book. Second, they contain an appealing mix of clarity and obscurity. With the exception of the heavily damaged texts of *The Husband's Message* and *The Ruin*, both of which fall in the damaged portion of the book, the manuscript conditions of the poems are excellent. Where the text is clear, it offers poignant, often picturesque descriptions of the world: snow-swept halls, ruins, crashing waves, the various fates of men falling in battle. Where there are cruces, they are intriguing: the conditions of the speakers in *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the reason for *The Seafarer*'s voyage, the enigmatic message (and

[15] See Niles, *Old English Enigmatic Poems*, esp. Ch. 5 and 6. *Wulf and Eadwacer* was, for many years, considered the first of the *Exeter Book* riddles. *The Husband's Message* is grouped in the manuscript among several riddles, and its layout on the manuscript page indicates that the transcriber believed it to be several separate riddles; furthermore, some critics have connected the riddle immediately preceding it, numbered 60 in Krapp and Dobbie, to be a part of the poem itself. See Krapp and Dobbie liv-lx.
[16] Fulk and Cain, 180
[17] Greenfield, "Elegies," 142. "Outside of *Beowulf*" is itself somewhat misleading, as several passages from the poem, particularly the speech of the last survivor (2247-66) and the father's lament (2444-62) are frequently cited as "elegiac;" see Charles Kennedy, *Earliest English Poetry: A Critical Survey of Poetry Written before the Norman Conquest with Illustrative Translations* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971), 126-30.

messenger) of the *Husband's Message*. Most of all, these texts engage with powerful themes and images in a more focused manner than is found in most other Old English texts. While the elements typically identified as characterizing the genre may be common to many Old English poems, these poems seem to bring them to the forefront and discuss them more expansively than do other texts in the canon. As Klinck points out, "given some reservations, the concept of 'elegy' in an Anglo-Saxon context provides us with a convenient locus for particular themes: exile, loss of loved ones, scenes of desolation, the transience of worldly joys."[18]

It seems clear from the ongoing discussion of the "genre" of the Old English elegy that critics who discuss these poems are speaking of a kind of rhetoric. With little to hold the group together in terms of formal characteristics and with no extant contemporary generic criteria to refer to, critics focus on the texts' use of style, imagery, emotion, and other rhetorical moves in order to achieve some kind of effect on an audience. Several rhetorical moves in particular seem to capture critical attention. First of all, the elegies deal with loss. This can take many forms – loss of position, possessions, freedom, loved ones, of life itself – either experienced personally or observed in others. Second, the texts frequently reflect on these losses and on the universality of such transience. In many texts, the narrator expounds on the topos of transience to explore the uncertain and temporary nature of human experiences. Third, most of the texts employ the topos of personal experience through the use of first-person narration and a motif of telling and of a person with experience recounting his or

[18] Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 11.

her knowledge of the world and its cruelty. Finally, the texts often provide some sort of consolation in the face of such loss and suffering. In some cases, this takes the form of a homiletic turn, using the reflection on the transitory nature of the world to emphasize the eternity of God's realm. Stylistically, the poems use a variety of rhetorical figures, such as repetition, rhetorical questions, comparison, and antithesis. Most of the elegies employ powerful, vivid imagery, particularly descriptions of the "natural" world: storms, seasons, wilderness, animals. Often, these images are described in ways that emphasize the natural world's hostility and contrast it with the world of human civilizations. This list is by necessity somewhat arbitrary and is not meant to catalogue all the features of a particular genre of poetry or rhetoric. Furthermore, even a cursory glance at these texts will reveal many instances in which the tropes listed do not apply to that text. For example, the homiletic turn is only explicitly present in four of the texts, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, and *Resignation*. Three of the poems, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message* are much more personally oriented and make little or no attempt to universalize based on the speaker's position. *The Ruin* stands apart as the only one on the list lacking a first-person narrator. My goal, however, is not so much to retroactively set the boundaries for a type of poetry or rhetoric but rather to establish a rhetorical framework for the study of these texts. In the discussion to follow, I will focus primarily on three texts: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Ruin*, the texts that contain the clearest examples of fearful, antithetical rhetoric and imagery inviting contemplation of transience and eternity.

As argued above, if the elegies are to be considered a genre, they should perhaps be considered so on the basis of their rhetoric, rhetoric that at once complains and consoles. According to Rosemary Woolf, most of the elegies, *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* in particular, belong to the genre of *planctus*, or complaint. According to Woolf, the characteristics that distinguish the *planctus* from elegiac poetry "are firstly that the speaker is invariably fictional and secondly that, whilst the subject of the lament may be a death, it can equally well be any kind of loss that is experienced intensely."[19] Woolf connects the genre of *planctus* to several Old English poems, such as *The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message*, and *Wulf and Eadwacer*.[20] Furthermore, according to Woolf, the genre is referenced in other Anglo-Saxon texts, such *Beowulf*: not only does *Beowulf* include examples of elegiac laments such as the last survivor's speech, it also references laments given by and for characters such as Hildeburh and Hroþgar.[21] Woolf connects the genre to both Germanic, pagan traditions and Christian authors with an incentive to draw from it. Referencing Alcuin's famous admonition, Woolf points out that "Ingeld may have nothing to do Christ but the Last Survivor in his lonely exile undoubtedly does."[22] The *planctus* genre, as described by Woolf, seems appropriate for *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* as well as for the other elegies in general. In both the

[19] Rosemary Woolf, "*The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and the Genre of *Planctus*," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (London: Notre Dame Press, 1975), 192.
[20] Of the remaining elegies, Woolf excludes *The Ruin* for its lack of an "I-speaker" and *Deor* and *Resignation* for unspecified other reasons (193, n. 2). She does not mention *The Riming Poem*, which does appear to correspond to the specifications of *planctus.*
[21] ibid, 193-5
[22] ibd, 195.

heroic and Christian worlds of Old-English poetry, complaint makes for powerful rhetoric. However, complaint is not the only purpose of the elegies.

Another side of the elegies' rhetoric is explored by J. E. Cross in his highly influential article on the genre of *The Wanderer*. In it, Cross identifies the poem with the rhetorical genre of *consolatio*, rhetoric designed "to console for death, exile, or any other misfortune of this world."[23] Like the *planctus* identified by Woolf, *consolatio* finds its locus in experiences of great distress, but in this case it is with the intention of providing some sort of specific solace. According to Cross, *The Wanderer* explores several types of consolation, both secular and Christian before settling on the homiletic tone of the ending. Cross sees in *The Wanderer* the influence of classical rhetoric: the text's use of rhetorical questions and repetition of starting words "suggests that the poet had a knowledge either of rhetoric, or of those writings where rhetorical figures abound."[24] While the poem does clearly employ specific rhetorical figures, I believe it is something of a reach to conclude based on these that whoever composed the poem did so in light the traditions of Classical rhetoric. As I have discussed previously, there is little direct evidence to suggest that the Anglo-Saxon vernacular tradition engaged with Classical rhetoric in any significant way. However, as I have also discussed previously, the lack of a specific rhetorical tradition is not the same as the lack of rhetoric. Whether or not *The Wanderer* was written in the model of a Classical or

[23] J.E. Cross, "On the Genre of *The Wanderer*," *Neophilologus* 45 (1961), 64. For a discussion of the consolatory aspects of *The Wanderer* from a psychoanalytic perspective, see Margaret Gunnarsdottir Champion, "From Plaint to Praise: Language as Cure in 'The Wanderer'," in *Old English Literature*, ed. R.M. Liuzza, 328-52 (New Haven: Yale, 2002).
[24] ibid, 63-4.

Patristic *consolatio* (or, for that matter, a *planctus*), it does seem to draw on powerful rhetorical commonplaces that describe the travails of earthly life while pointing to consolation in a life to come. At the same time, this rhetoric of consolation cannot fully silence the rhetoric of complaint. As discussed above, the rhetoric of the elegies is ambivalent, drawing the audience to contemplate both transience and eternity.

In my readings of these texts, I identify three primary rhetorical antitheses: in the first, the transient suffering of the world is contrasted with the permanent bliss of the future world. This serves as a reminder to the audience to think on eternity when confronted by difficult times; however, the promise of eternity cannot altogether contend with the fear with a lost past. In the second, the life of an exile is contrasted with a life within a structured community. Here, too, the promise of a renewed community, hope for the exiles, cannot always compensate for the lamentations for those outside of society's comforts. In the third, humans' transient lives and works are contrasted with a force that is not so much eternal as inevitable: the forces of the natural world, ever defeating human efforts. It is with this antithesis that the idea of consolation seems to disappear completely: when compared with the vast, uncaring natural world, individual human lives seem very short and brief – nothing more than a bird's passage through a hall.

5.3 Transience/Eternity

In Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, discussed at length in chapter two, the homilist warns that "hit is on worolde aa swa leng swa wyrse" [it is in the world ever worse and worse]. Such references to the declining state of the world can be found throughout Anglo-Saxon literature in both prose and poetry. In religious writing, such as the homilies of Wulfstan and Ælfric, this was often connected to eschatology, particularly the theology of the ages of history and the worsening of sin in the world as it ages and nears the end.[25]This sentiment is clearly shared by the speakers of many Old English poems, such as that of *The Seafarer*, who decries that

> næron nu cyningas ne caseras
> ne goldgiefan sylce iu wæron,
> þonne hi mæst mid him mærþa gefremedon
> ond on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.
> Gedroren is þeos duguð eal; dreamas sind gewintene.
> Wuniað þa wacran ond þas woruld healdaþ,
> brucað þurh bisgo.
>
> [there are not now kings nor Caesars nor gold-givers as long ago were, when they together performed the most great deeds and in lordly fate lived. Fallen is all this troop; joys are departed. The weaker remain and occupy the earth, enjoying it through toil]. (82-5)

The purpose of Wulfstan's rhetoric in *Sermo Lupi*, as discussed in chapter two, is to draw connections between the general eschatological idea of the declining world and

[25] Harris, *Race and Ethnicity*, 118. For a discussion of the ages of history, see Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 77-81.

the specific historical moment of the Anglo-Saxons in 1014. In the elegies, particularly in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, the speakers employ a universalizing rhetoric of fear for the decline of the world around them. This is part of the overall rhetorical strategy in which the transience of the world is contrasted with the eternal life with God promised to all Christians. This invites the audience to fearfully contemplate the state of their own lives and to direct their attention toward the life to come. At the same time, this rhetorical antithesis often evokes ambivalent emotions to the transient world that it ostensibly condemns.

The rhetoric of transience employs a particular vocabulary: according to Fell, the antithesis of temporary and eternal is most frequently presented in Old English with the words "læne" (literally "lent") and "ece" (eternal). Fell demonstrates this distinction with an example from the Alfredian version of *Augustine's Soliloquies* which compares the difference between mortal and immortal life to the difference between the land granted temporarily to a servant with the land permanently chartered to him by a munificent lord.[26] In the elegies, this specific contrast between læne and ece is only specifically explored in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*; these two texts are in fact the only ones of the set in which the word "læne" occurs. In these texts, the message is quite clear, particularly in a justifiably famous passage in *The Wanderer*: "Her bið feoh læne, her bið freond læne, / her bið mon læne, her bið mæg læne" [Here is wealth transitory, here is friend transitory, here is man transitory, here is kinsman[27] transitory].

[26] Fell, "Perceptions of Transience," 173-4.
[27] Klinck glosses this word as "maiden." While pointing out that "most translate [the word as] 'kinsman,'" Klinck claims that the former meaning is well attested in poetry and "would provide a better

(108-9) A well-known analogue for this passage can be found in the Old Norse *Havamal*:

> Deyr fé deyia frœndr,
>
> deyr siálfr it sama;
>
> enn orðztírr deyr aldregi,
>
> hveim er sér góðan getr.
>
> [Cattle die, kinsmen die, you yourself will likewise die; but fame never dies for the one who gets good [fame] for himself].[28]

In the *Havamal*, eternity is represented solely in the form of the words that outlive a man. The Christian-influenced rhetoric of *The Wanderer*, however, contrasts the rental lifestyle of mortals with the ownership society of heaven in the homiletic images of eternity that close the poem: "Wel bið þam þe him are seceð, / frofre to fæder on heofonum, þær us eal seo fæstnung stondeð" [Well is he who seeks grace, comfort from the Father in heaven, where the stability of all of us stands]. (114-5). *The Seafarer* expresses a similar sentiment in equally stark terms, rejecting "þis deade lif, / læne on londe" [this dead life, transitory on land] (65-6) in favor of "ecan lifes blæd, / dream mid dugeþum" [eternal life's riches, joy with a noble troop"] (79-80). As Fell points out, the words used to describe eternal life in these lines "normally denote earthly well-

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balance with *mon* in the a-verse" (126). However, there is not a similar concern for such balance in the previous line and it is not clear that an Anglo-Saxon text would show that much concern with a balance between man and woman.

[28] Qtd. in Robert Bjork, "*Sundor æt Rune*: The Voluntary Exile of The Wanderer," in Liuzza, *Old English Literature*, 321. See also Fell, "Perceptions of Transience," 175.

being," a contrast further emphasized when the same vocabulary recurs with its typical, secular meaning.[29]

The ambiguity between vocabulary used to describe the human and divine worlds is at least in part a symptom of the evolution of the Old English language in the context of its culture. As noted previously, Anglo-Saxon England was home to the most substantial vernacular culture of its time, much of it devoted to religious prose. As such, Old English had great need for religious terminology not necessarily present in the existing language. Frequently, an existing term would be used to express a Latin term with similar meaning. Linguistically, this is known as a "semantic loan." As explained by Helmut Gneuss,

> A semantic loan is created when a native word is employed with the specific meaning of a foreign word, a meaning which is usually somehow related to the range of senses of the native word. Examples are: OE *synn* – originally 'crime, guilt, hostility' – is used in the sense of Latin *peccatum* 'an offence against the laws of God and Church'; OE *giefu* – 'gift' – translates Latin *gratia* '(God's) grace; OE *eadig* and *gesælig* – originally both mean 'happy, wealthy' – render Latin *beatus* 'blessed'.[30]

As Helmutt Gneuss points out, Old English poetry made use of many different alliterating words to express religious concepts – "God" or "the Lord" might be referred to as "*dryhten, frea, god, hlaford, þeoden, wealdend.*"[31] Within the same text, these

[29] Fell, "Perceptions of Transience," 174.
[30] Helmutt Gneuss, "The Old English Language," Godden and Lapidge, *Cambridge Companion*, 42-3.
[31] ibid, 48.

words might be used also to express a secular concept. For example, the word "dryhten" might apply to either an earthly lord or The Lord, often in the expression "ece dryhten," [eternal Lord], which appears in the final line of *The Wanderer*.

As Burke points out in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, this is an inevitable facet of human language. According to Burke, words can be sorted generally into four orders. The first three are empirical concepts: the natural realm, the socio-political realm, and "words about words." Beyond this is a fourth realm, reserved for "supernatural" concepts, for which words must be borrowed from the other three orders.[32] There is, however, a reverse of this process:

> For whereas the words for the "supernatural" realm are necessarily borrowed from the realm of our everyday experiences, out of which our familiarity with language arises, once a terminology has been developed for special theological purposes the order can become reversed. We can borrow back the terms from the borrower, again secularizing to varying degrees the originally secular terms that had been given "supernatural" connotations.[33]

Such movements back and forth between the realm of the supernatural and the everyday can be seen throughout Old English literature. The similar vocabulary used for the human and the divine can at times lead to ambiguity.[34] For example, in *The Husband's Message*, in which an exiled lord reaches out to a woman– his wife or his betrothed –

[32] Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*, U of California Press, 1970, 14-5.

[33] ibid, 7.

[34] Although it is conventional in Modern English texts – and some Modern English editions of Old English poetry to use capitalization to distinguish between terms – e.g. lord/dryhten and The Lord/Dryhten – such a practice is not evident in Old English texts.

with whom he had earlier exchanged vows, a messenger tells the separated wife to take to the sea, "þæt þu suð heonan ofer merelade monnan findest / þær se þeoden is þin on wonum" [that you south from here over the sea-water find the man where the lord is waiting for you] (27-9). In this context, who is the "þeoden" in question: her husband and earthly lord or her eternal Lord? While the context of the love story that the rest of the poem seems to tell suggests the former, the divine sense of the word retains some presence in the meaning of the line. By the same token, the divine sense of the world carries within itself the rhetorical force of the familiar, secular meaning: a relationship between a believer and God is like that of a thane and his earthly lord, or – in the case of *The Husband's Message* – that of a wife to her husband.

The blurring of the line between the vocabulary of human and divine strengthens the rhetorical antithesis of transience/eternity. Seen from this light, the worldly relationships sought by speakers in elegiac poetry are pale mirrors of the eternity that they should truly seek. Such is the case in *The Wanderer*. Early on, the speaker mourns the loss of his earthly lord, which has led to his exiled state:

siþþan geara iu goldwinne minne
hrusan heolstra biwrah, ond ic hean þonan
wod wintercearig ofer waþema gebind,
sohte seledroerig sinces bryttan,
hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahte
þone þe in meodhealle min mine wisse,
oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde, weman mid wynnum

[since years ago my gold-lord was covered with the darkness of the earth and I henceforth went with winter-sorrow across the frozen waves, sought with hall-sorrow the treasures' distributor, wherever far or near I might find those who in the mead hall felt love for me, or would comfort me, friendless, entice me with wine] (22-9).

As will become clear throughout the poem, all of these things – the lord, the friends, and the treasures associate with them – will pass away. It is only the "are" [grace] and "frofre" [comfort] of the Father in heaven that are permanent. The elegiac rhetoric of *The Wanderer* makes it clear that seeking the grace and comfort proffered only by the mortal world is always doomed to failure. According to Cross, the comfort of Christian salvation is the poem's ultimate consolatory move: all other attempts to provide secular consolation come up short "in order to emphasise the supreme consolation of security in the next life."[35] In other words, emphasizing the paucity of earthly comforts encourages the audience to seek comfort only in eternity.

Although the rhetoric of eternity emphasizes that permanence should be sought in heaven, the rhetoric of transience relies on nostalgia for the heroic world of humankind. Perhaps the most frequently quoted passage used to illustrate the theme of transience in the elegies is the famed "hwær cwom" passage of *The Wanderer*:

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?

Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas?

Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga! Eala þeodnes þrym!

[35] Cross, "The Genre of the Wanderer," 71.

Hu seo þrag gewat, genap under hihthelm, swa heo no wær"

[Where is the horse? Where is the young man? Where is the treasure giver? Where are the seats of feasts? Where are the hall joys? Each bright cup! Each mail-clad warrior! All of the king's splendor! How the time departed, taken under night-shadow as if it never were!] (92-6).

The passage employs a familiar rhetorical trope, often referred to as the "*ubi sunt*" motif, after its Latin equivalent. According to Claudia Di Sciacca, Isidore of Seville's *Synonyma* appears to have provided Anglo-Saxon writers with their source for the motif.[36] The rhetorical questions of the *ubi sunt* dwell on the past-ness of the past and the temporary nature of all things related to humanity, inviting the audience to answer "they are all gone." However, according to Sciacca, "the *ubi sunt* topos is oriented towards the past and thus often betrays an ambivalent nature, divided as it is between contempt and nostalgia."[37] Although the audience is invited to reject the worldly goods that are now passed away, the power of the rhetoric depends at least in part on the audience treasuring the lost original; the losses recounted in the "hwær cwom" lament are all trappings associated with Germanic heroic poetry – horses, warriors, treasures, lordship, the social institutions of the hall.

Staring at worldly transience from across the rhetorical gulf is the trope of eternal life. In Old English literature, this topic is explored most fully in homiletic literature. Vernacular homilies with an eschatological focus dwell extensively on the

[36] Claudia Di Sciacca, "The 'Ubi Sunt' Motif and the Soul-and-Body Legend in Old English Homilies: Sources and Relationships," *JEGP* 105 (2006): 365

[37] ibid, 366.

eternal fate of the soul and the body. For example, in Ælfric's *Sermo ad Populum*, discussed in chapter two, Ælfric describes the eternal portion for the devils and the damned: "On anum fyre hi byrnað on þam byrnendan mere, ða earman menniscan men, and ða modigan deoflu; þæt fyr bið ðonne ece, and hi ecelice bynað, ac heora lichaman ne magon næfre forbyrnan, for ðan ðe hi beoð ece æfter þam æriste" [In one fire they burn in the burning lake, the wretched portion of men, and the proud devils; that fire is then eternal, and they burn eternally, but their bodies may never burn up, because they [the bodies] are eternal after the resurrection] (473-6). The blessed, on the other hand, will inhabit a new heaven and earth with the Lord, "and ðær soðlice bið an ece dæg, ðe næfre geendað, and hi be twyfealdan beoð þonne gewuldrode on sawle and on lichaman, and hi scinað æfre swa beorhte swa sunne on heora Fæder rice." [and there truly is one eternal day, which never ends, and they are then doubly glorified in soul and in body, and they shine forever as brightly as the sun in their Father's kingdom] (568-71). Eternity, in these homiletic contexts, serves as a rhetorical end-point, a never-ending conclusion to a story in the process of being written. Those who have repented of their sins may look forward to life after doomsday; those who have not had better get started.

Unlike in the homilies, the rhetoric of eternal suffering is not well represented.[38] Despite establishing a tone of terror at the loss and destruction of everything on this earth, elegiac rhetoric often takes an optimistic term. The most optimistic "elegy" is

[38] One possible reference can be found in *Resignation*, 57-8 "glugon hy him æt þam geleafan. Forþon hy longe sculon, / werge wihta, wræce þrowian" [They {the devils} deceived them from the true belief, therefore they shall for a long time, the cursed creatures, endure exile].

certainly *The Husband's Message*, in which the husband's messenger tells the poem's internal audience

> Nu se mon hafað
> wean oferwunne; nis him wilna gad,
> ne meara, ne maðma, ne mododreama, ænges ofer eroþan eorl gestreona,
> þeodnes dohtor, gif he þin beneah"
> [Now the man has overcome woes; he is not lacking in desires, not mares, nor treasures, nor mead-joys, any noble treasures of the earth, prince's daughter, if he enjoys you] (44-8).

This sentiment is far from what is expressed in most of the other elegies, since the internal audience of *The Husband's Message* is promised joys on earth; as discussed above, elegiac rhetoric generally involves people being deprived of such joys. Indeed, what is promised her is almost a direct answer to the *ubi sunt* rhetoric of *The Wanderer*. It is worth considering the possibility that, as suggested by the ambiguous vocabulary for human and divine lordship, this consolation is being offered in the form of eternal life with God, a move more typical to elegiac rhetoric.. In *The Seafarer*, for example, the narrator recounts his own sorrows and the general nature of the world, inviting his audience to turn their thoughts to heaven:

> Uton we hycgan hwær we ham agen
> ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen,
> ond we þonne eac tilien þæt we to moten,
> in þa ecan eadignesse

þær is lif gelong in lufan dryhtnes,

hyht in heofonum

[Let us think about where we own a home and then think how we may come there, and we then also strive that we may go there, in the eternal bliss where life is dependent on the love of the Lord, high in heaven] (117-22).

Eternity is presented as a stark contrast with the transience of the world, an answer to the depredations of life described throughout the poem.

The rhetoric of eternity in the elegies points towards eternal life, but it often does so by highlighting mortal death. Indeed, elegiac rhetoric often discusses death in a way that offers little or no consolation for the end of a person's life. Homiletic literature frequently discusses physical death in terms of eternal life. For example, in *Sermo ad Populum*, Ælfric explains that "Ælc man him ondræt þæs lichaman deað, and feawa him ondrædað þære sawle deað. Þam lichaman men tiliað, þe la[n]ge lybban ne mæg, and ne tiliað þære sawle þe ne swelt on ecnysse." [Each man dreads the bodily death, and few dread their soul's death. Men toil for the body, which does not live long, and do not toil for the soul, which dies not in eternity] (119-21). Here, Ælfric emphasizes both the eternity of the soul and the transience of the body; this serves the dual purpose of consoling those who look forward to life in heaven and terrifying those whose account of sin and atonement is not truly balanced. Similarly, *The Seafarer* emphasizes the differences between mortal and immortal expectations:

Þeah þe græf wille golde stregan

broþor his geborennum – byrgan be deadum –

maþmum mislicum þæt hine mid will,

ne mæg þære sawle þe biþ synna ful

gold togeoce for godes egsan,

þonne he hit ær hydeð þenden he her leofað

[Although the grave will be strewn with gold by the brother of his fellow-born – buried with the dead – various treasures which he wishes to go with him, the soul which is sinful may not be saved by gold from the fear of God, when he hid it previously while he lived here] (97-102).

In a passage from *The Wanderer* with a somewhat similar focus, those slain in battle go to grisly fates:

Sume wig fornom,

ferede in forðwege; sumne fugel oþbær

ofer heanne hom; sumne se hara wulf

deaðe gedælde; sumne dreorighleor

in eorðscræfe eorl gehydde."

[Some battle took away, one a bird bore off over high seas; one was delivered to death by the gray wolf, one sad in face hid his lord in an earthen cave] (80-4).

Here, the consolation of eternity could not seem more distant: those who die are carried off by the conventional beasts of battle – the wolf along with birds of prey – or buried in the ground by their grieving thanes. The repetition of "sumne" universalizes the experience: any of us could be the body or the burier. This attention to the fate of bodies is the ultimate reminder of human transience. This sign can be, as in *The Seafarer*, a

reminder that no worldly goods will follow us into eternity, or it can simply be a reminder of the fate of all mortals. This is the crux of consolatory rhetoric of eternity: the promise of a new life to come is dependent on the end of this one. The rhetoric that emphasizes a world in which nothing will pass away must first contend with everything of this world passing away.

5.4 Exile/Acceptance

In addition to contemplating the transience of worldly things and human lives, elegiac rhetoric also describes the transience of social orders by employing the trope of exile. In many of the poems, the first-person narrator describes a journey or experience of exile. The "anhaga" of *The Wanderer* must "wadan wræclastas" [go through paths of exile] (5); the female narrator of *The Wife's Lament* tells us "A ic wite won minra wræcsiþa" [Always I have suffered torment in my experiences of exile] (5); the narrator of *Resignation* describes himself as "wineleas wræcca" [joyless exile] (91). The element "wræc," usually translated as "misery" or "exile" is connected to the verb "wrecan," "to drive, impel, push," also with the sense of "banish."[39] The "wræccu," then, is one in the process of being driven, someone in motion. In some poems, the narrator is someone in transition, never in one place, always seeking with little or no hope of finding. In other cases, the exile is one of isolation, as is the apparent case in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*. All three deal with women who have been separated from men to whom they owe some allegiance, although the situations in the texts are far from clear. Whatever the specific nature of the exile, descriptions of exile

[39] Clark and Hall, *Anglo Saxon Dictionary*.

in these texts focuses primarily on the severing of the social bonds that had previously defined their existence., social bonds closely associated with the idea of the hall. As Kathryn Hume explains, the hall represents not just a building in which the lord and his retainers gather to feast, "but the social system associated with it." In literary depiction, the hall is "a circle of light and peace enclosed by darkness, discomfort and danger."[40] This can be seen quite clearly in the exemplum from Bede discussed earlier in the chapter, where the hall stands in for all the joys and comforts of a human life, a brief respite from surrounding storms. In the rhetoric of the elegies, the hall is a topos against which the concept of exile is defined. The rhetoric of exile in these texts emphasizes both the importance of these social bonds and their tenuousness. As Robert Bjork points out,

> exile itself, as one constant tradition in the Anglo-Saxon world, can affirm that world and be as dearly clung to as the seemingly more positive aspects of life. Though perhaps the most intense and painful experience one can have within Anglo-Saxon society, exile is nevertheless an accepted (even expected) part of Anglo-Saxon-life, a part that both the culture and the language accommodate.[41]

Exile, in other words is part of the rhetoric of community, in much the same way that worldly transience is part of the rhetoric of eternity: one is highlighted to strengthen the audience's commitment to the other.

[40] Hume, Kathryn, "The Concept of Hall in Old English Poetry," in *Anglo Saxon England* 3 (1974), 63-74. 64.
[41] Bjork, "*Sundor æt Rune:* The Voluntary Exile of The Wanderer," in Liuzza, 316.

The rhetoric of the elegies constructs an exile that is beyond the bounds of structure and order, as either a pathless wanderer or prisoner in an isolated, barren place – the "eorðscræfe" of *The Wife's Lament* or the island "fenne biworpen" [surrounded by fens] (5b) of *Wulf and Eadwacer*. Bereft of the comfort of the hall, the exiles occupy what Hume identifies as the "anti-hall." Opposed to the hall concept, the anti-hall is the dwelling place of malignant beings and chaos.[42] In the case of the elegies, the primary antagonists are the sorrow and suffering that the narrators endure, and the places they occupy are sometimes even described as "halls," such as the Wife's "eorðsele" and the Seafarer's "cearselda."[43] The place of exile, then, is a threatening, fearful non-place. The exile, with no safe place to occupy, can be identified with what Kristeva calls the deject: "The one by whom the abject exists."[44] According to Kristeva,

> the *deject* never stops demarcating his universe whose fluid confines … constantly question his solidity and impel him to start afresh. A tireless builder, the *deject* is in short a *stray*. He is on a journey … the end of which keeps receding. He has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting him represents for him, but he cannot help taking the risk at the very moment he sets himself apart. And the more he strays, the more he is saved.[45]

The exiled narrators of these texts both define and are defined by the places they occupy. As they wander or wait, the rhetoric of the poem shapes the world around them to reflect their exiled space. Commenting on *The Wanderer*, Woolf points out that

[42] Hume, "Concept of Hall," 68.
[43] ibid.,70.
[44] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 6.
[45] ibid., 8.

"There does not seem to be any historical reason why a man who had lost his lord should not sooner or later in his travels find another …; certainly there is no reason why the Wanderer should live in a world where the weather is perpetual winter."[46] But rhetorically speaking, the topos of permanent exile and permanent winter direct the audience to contemplate the world beyond the individual situation of this exile and towards a contemplation of a world in which all of us are ultimately exiles.

The pre-exile world described in the elegies is, as discussed above, deeply connected to the world of Germanic heroic poetry. As the titular exile of *The Wanderer* dwells on his present state, he recalls the past: "gemon he selesecgas on sincþege, / hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine wenede to wiste" [He remembers hall-companions and hall-joys, how his gold lord in his youth accustomed him to feast] (35-6). Later, overcome by sorrow, he dreams of past joys, recalling what appear to be rituals of the hall:

> þinceð him on mode þæt he his mondryhten
> clyppe on cysse ond on cneo lecge
> honda and heafod, swa he hwilum ær
> in geardagum giefstolas breac
> [He thinks in his spirit that he his lord hugs and kisses and on his knee lays hands and head, as he at times before in days of yore at the gift seat enjoyed] (41-4).

[46] Woolf, "*The Wanderer*," 201.

The specific ritual being described here – if anything specific is intended – is unknown and probably unimportant.[47] What is clear from the passage is that the ritual was, along with feasting and gift-giving, part of a system that bound a community together. In the poem's present day, this community has been dissolved, replaced with a non-community of exile. The transience discussed above – the loss of worldly things, the death of companions and lord – have shattered whatever bonds once provided meaning and stability.

The Seafarer also depicts a journey of exile, as the narrator announces at the beginning of the poem: "Mæge ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan, siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum earfoðhwile oft þrowade" [May I for myself recount a true tale, speak of experiences, how I often endured days of toil, times of hardship]. Although the trials he experiences on the sea – to be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter -- are in the past, he seems to look forward to future exile:

> Forþon cnyssað nu
> heortan geþohtas þæt ic hean steamas,
> sealyþa gelac sylf cunnige;
> monað modes lust mæla gehwylce,
> ferð to feran þæt ic feor heonan
> elþeodigra eard gesece

[47] See Klinck, 113-4 for a discussion of interpretations of this ritual. Klinck suggests that the ritual described may be related to gift-given, which is mentioned specifically in the passage.

> [Therefore now agitates the thoughts of my heart that I the high seas, salt-waves' tossing myself understand; the desire of my spirit constantly prompts, spirit to travel that I far hence should seek the land of foreigners] (33-38).

These lines have sparked much debate, as they seem to indicate either a change in attitude from one that has suffered at sea to one who wants to experience it.[48] However, as Rosemary Woolf points out, it is doubtful that

> a pious Englishman of the age of Bede and Boniface, or indeed much later, would have seen, as modern scholars have done, any inconsistency in a man's determination, or even eagerness, to venture forth on a journey whose perils and hardships he fully understands from his previous experience, in order to 'seek out the land of foreigners afar off.'[49]

Whether this is a willing or compelled journey, the narrator recognizes that is one that will set himself apart from the world. Before announcing his plans to depart on another journey, the narrator draws a sharp line between those who have endured hardships as he has and those who live on land:

> Forþon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn,
> gebiden in burgum, bealosiþa hwon,
> wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft

[48] The words "forþon" in line 33 – also at another transitional passage in line 27 – and "sylf" in line 35 have been variously translated; See Klinck 130-1 and 133. For two views on "sylf," see Pope, "Second Thoughts on *The Seafarer*," and Greenfield, "*Sylf*, Seasons, Structure and Genre in *The Seafarer*," both in *Old English Shorter Poems: Basic Readings*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, (New York, Garland, 1994).

[49] Whitelock, Dorothy, "The Interpretation of *The Seafarer*," in *Essential articles for the Study of Old English Poetry*, ed. Jess B. Bessinger, Jr. and Stanley Kahrl (Hamden, Archon 1968), 444.

in brimlade bidan sceolde.

[Therefore little believes him, the one who possesses life's joy, dwelling in cities, with few terrible journeys, proud and wine-drunk, how I often weary should dwell in the sea-path] (27-30).

Whether or not "wlonc ond wingol" is intended as morally pejorative,[50] the narrator appears to place a certain moral and psychological value on the "bealosiþ" which he knows far better than do the proud city-dwellers. Unlike the narrator of *The Wanderer*, he describes his state of exile as preferable to the life of the hall:

Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge ne to hringþege –

ne to wife wyn ne to worulde hyht –

ne ymbe owiht elles nefne ymb yða gewealc,

ac a hafað longunge se þe on lagu fundað.

[His thoughts are not to the harp or to receiving of rings – nor to pleasure in women nor to worldly hope – nor around anything else except about the tossing of waves, but the one who hastens to the sea always has longing] (44-7).

Here, the joys of earth, those which an exile might desire to return to, are dismissed in favor of a longing to return to the sea.

Another form of exile is evident in the two poems of this set that deal with female speakers: *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*. As Shari Horner points out, these two are the only ones of the elegies to "exhibit the kind of physical enclosure

[50] According to Klinck, the element "-gal," meaning "wanton, lascivious," is used negatively in several other texts, such as *Judgment Day*, *Daniel*, and *The Fortunes of Men*. On the other hand, the phrase "wlonc ond wingal" also appears in *The Ruin* 34 (discussed later in this chapter) with no obvious negative connotation. See Klinck, 131.

which dominated cultural attitudes towards the female body; 'The Wanderer and 'The Seafarer,' by contrast, evoke imagery of voyaging, wandering, unfettered movement."[51] *The Husband's Message* also deals with confinement and isolation, although it does so in the context liberation from those conditions. In all three of these poems, isolation and confinement are described in terms of exile and separation from the bonds of society. The speaker in *The Wife's Lament* is not just confined, she is cut off from the social relationships that had previously defined her, social relations that are borrowed from the world of the heroic. As Marilynn Desmond points out, the terms used to describe the estranged husband, such as "hlaford[lord], leodfruma[chieftain], wine [friendly lord], frea [lord of a people], and freond [friend]," all have specific connotations within the heroic world of Anglo-Saxon poetry, usually related to the military and heroic exploits of men.[52] In *The Husband's Message*, as discussed above, similar language is used to describe the characters involved.[53] On the other hand, the possessive forms in the extant text – "mondryhten min" (6), "mines frean," (10), and (possibly) "min wine" – all refer to the relationship between the messenger narrator of the poem and the one who sent him. In *The Wife's Lament*, the personal relationship of the separated couple is much more deeply felt. Exactly why she is separated from this man is unclear: all the audience is told is that

[51] Shari Horner, "En/closed Subjects: *The Wife's Lament* and the Culture of Early Medieval Female Monasticism," in Liuzza, 383-4.
[52] Marilynn Desmond, "The Voice of Exile: Feminist Literary History and the Anonymous Anglo-Saxon Elegy," *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (1990), 586.
[53] As I also discussed above, the words used for social relationships in this and other Old English texts are frequently employed to describe God and that this religious connotation is carried back into the social sphere. The fact that these terms are also applied at times to relationships between men and women adds another interesting layer of connotation to this process.
[54] Horner, "En/closed Subjects", 387.

Ongunnon þæt þæs monnes magas hycgan

þurh dyrne geþoht þæt hy todælden unc,

þæt wit gewidost in woruldrice

lifdon laðlicost, ond mec longade."

[That man's kin set about to think through secret thoughts that they would separate the two of us, that we two widest in the world's kingdoms lived most hatefully, and longing occupied me] (11-4).

Separated from her lover, she is forced to occupy an earthen cave, where her isolation is complete. As Horner explains,

> The enclosed setting is emphasized through three repetitions: *eorðscræfe* (28b), *eorðsele* (29a), and *eorðscrafu* (36b). She differentiates this dwelling from her previous worldly life; the earth cave (*wic wynna leas* a joyless dwelling 32a) contrasts with her memory of the pleasant dwellings (*wynlicran wic* 52a) of the past she shared with her lord.[54]

This rhetoric of isolation and enclosure emphasizes the fearful state of the exile and the devastating effects of removal from the bonds of society into the bonds of exile.

The narrator of *Wulf and Eadwacer* faces a similar confinement, although one even less clear than that of *The Wife's Lament*. The interpretive difficulties of these nineteen lines are legion. As Peter Baker points out, "perhaps half [of the poem's lines] pose lexical, syntactical, or interpretive problems."[55] What is clear from the poem is that the speaker

[54] Horner, "En/closed Subjects", 387.
[55] Peter S. Baker, "The Ambiguity of *Wulf and Eadwacer*," in O'Brien O'Keefe, *Old English Shorter Poems*, 394.

– a woman, as indicated by feminine "reotugu" [wailing][56] – is separated from someone she cares for named Wulf and is forced into isolation on an island, held there by a man named Eadwacer. Although *Wulf and Eadwacer* does not employ the same kind of heroic vocabulary to describe the relationships between the characters, the language of the poem references the heroic world of the hall-community, "þreat" [troop] (2, 7); militarism, the "wælreowe weras" [slaughter-cruel men] that guard the island where Wulf (or possibly the speaker) is imprisoned (6); and the legal system of exile, Wulf, the beloved's name is suggestive of the wolf-head, associated with outlaws.[57] Another fascinating aspect of the vocabulary of *Wulf and Eadwacer* is the way in which it emphasizes confinement through the language of motion. After the narrator describes her and Wulf's confinement on separate islands, the audience is told "Willað hy hine aþecgan gif he on þreat cymeð" [They will kill him if he comes into the troop]. While the previous statement of this same line is ambiguous,[58] here it is much easier to read as a statement of what the "wælreowe weras" mentioned in the previous line intend toward Wulf. The threat of violence holds Wulf in place, a fact the narrator decries, complaining in litotese of his "seldcymas" [seldom comings] (14). Not only his absence, but also his wanderings have troubled the speaker: "Wulfes ic mines widlastum wenum dogode[59]" [I followed my Wulf's wide journey in my hopes].

[56]ibid., 399-400.
[57] Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 171.
[58] The grammar of lines 2 and 7 could be taken as either a question or a statement; adding to the confusion of the line is the verb "aþecgan," which has been interpreted as both "welcome" and "kill." See Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 169 and Baker, "Ambiguity," 395-7.
[59] Krapp and Dobbie, Klinck, and others accept MS "dogode," otherwise unattested, which Klinck translates as "followed (like a dog)". Others, including Baker, prefer to emend to "hogode," [thought of],

Whether the speaker has actually followed his journeys or merely thought of them (see note on "dogode"), any movement on her part now seems out of the question, and Wulf's future movement are predicted in ominous terms: "Uncerne earne hwelp bireð wulf to wuda" [Our wretched whelp is born of by Wulf/a wolf to the woods]. Elsewhere, as in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, motion is used to describe the path of the exile; in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the language of motion is employed to entrap the speaker in her exile. The fearful and mournful state of her exile is created through a rhetoric that opposes the motion of others to her isolation and confinement.

Whether the exiled subject is described as bound in place or as a rootless wanderer, the rhetoric of exile emphasizes the perpetual movement from one place – a place of comfort and social stability within the hall – to another – a place in which familiar bonds are shattered, binding the exile into a world of isolation. As with the antithesis of transience and eternity, the negative side of the equation is emphasized, perhaps with the intent of making the positive seem all the better. And indeed, the rhetoric of the mournful exile often highlights the joys and glories of the life before exile. But in these descriptions of the exile's path from community to isolation, there is little hope given to the return from exile. The exiled subject is left alone to face the threats of a powerful, hostile world.

5.5 Humans vs. Nature

The land and landscapes associated with the Old English elegies provides some of their most distinctive stylistic features. Most discussions of the elegies reference their

taking "widlastum" as its object and translating the line "I thought with hope of my Wulf's long journey." See Krapp-Dobbie, 320; Klinck, 172; Baker, 399.

use of imagery related to nature, animals, seasons, storms, and the sea. With little exception, the natural world in these texts is portrayed as hostile and threatening, as opposed to the comfortable and familiar world of society and the hall. These are commonplaces in the discussion of Old English poetry, but the concepts they represent are really quite complex. Jennifer Neville argues that, although Anglo-Saxon texts depict elements of nature, the Anglo-Saxons lacked the concept of a "natural world" from a modern perspective, as "an entity defined by the exclusion of the supernatural."[60] These depictions of nature are never included for their own sake but are "always ancillary to other issues," such as the relationships between humans and the universe, the state, and the divine.[61] As such, representations of nature in Anglo-Saxon texts should be read rhetorically. This is evident in Bede's exemplum of the bird flying through the hall, certainly one of the most familiar uses of the stormy-weather trope in Anglo-Saxon literature. According to Neville, the literal level of Bede's example demonstrates Anglo-Saxons' perspective of their place in the world:

> the human race lives precariously, with only brief moments of respite in places of refuge like the hall, which is surrounded on all sides … by the forces of the natural world, by rain, storm and snow. The natural world inescapably and overwhelmingly overshadows the human race with its vast power.[62]

For Edwin and his counselors, Christianity, with its promise of a secure afterlife, holds the consolation for this transitory life. But, as I argue above, the rhetoric of the elegies

[60] Jennifer Neville, *Representations of the Natural World in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1999), 2-3, http://libproxy.uta.edu:2076/Reader/
[61] ibid., 18.
[62] ibid., 25.

is much more ambivalent on the subject: the subject of this rhetoric is the bird that has already fled the hall, the warmth of the hall but a bitter memory. Their world is the rain, snow, and hail that the bird had been flying through. Imagery of the natural world in the elegies helps establish the location of exile as a terrifying, transgressive space. In terms of rhetorical antithesis, nature is opposed to human efforts, just as exile is opposed to nostalgia for life in the hall and transience is opposed to life in eternity. But in those antitheses, one side offers a sliver of hope or at least a pleasant memory. Imagery of nature emphasizes the fearful state of human lives and the transient nature of human efforts.

Some of the most powerful imagery in all of Old English poetry is found in the descriptions of the sea in winter in *The Seafarer*:

Calde geþrungen
wæron mine fet, forste gebunden,
caldum clommum, þær þa ceare seofedun
hat' ymb heortan, hungor innan slat
merewerges mod. Þæt se mon ne wat
þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
winter wunade wræccan lastum,
winemægum bidroren,
bihongen hrimgicelum; hægl scurum fleag.

[Oppressed by cold were my feat, bound by frost, in cold bonds, where the care lamented hot around the heart, hunger within tore the sea-weary spirit. That man understands not to whom it most fairly befalls on earth, how I, wretched and sad in the ice-cold sea in winter inhabited paths of exile, deprived of dear kinsmen, hung about with icicles; hail storms flew]. (8b-17)

The description encompasses a variety of topoi associated with exile and the elegies: wandering, wretchedness, the loss of kinsmen, confinement, a situation that can only be understood by those with experience. Here and elsewhere, the imagery of frost and storms adds emphasis to the transience and uncertainty of the exile's life. In addition to storms, animals also play an important role in defining the limits of the human experience in several of the elegies. In two similar passages from *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*, the calls of birds are contrasted with the familiar voices of men. In the former, the bird-songs are used to emphasize the difference in outlook between the archetypal seaman and landlubber:

Hwilum ylfete[63] song
dyde ic me to gomene, ganetes hleoþor,
ond huilpan sweg fore hleahtor wera,
mæw singende fore medodrince.
Stormas þær stanclifu beotan, þær him stearn oncwæð
isigfeþera, ful oft þæt earn bigeal
urigfeþra."

[63] For the identification of this and the other birds mentioned, see Margaret Goldsmith, "The Seafarer and the Birds," *Review of English Studies* 5 (1954), 225-35.

[At times the swan's song I did enjoy, gannet's voice, and curlew's sound before the laughter of men, the seagull singing before mead-drinking. Storms beat the stone-cliffs there, where the icy-featherered tern cried out to them, full often the wet feathered eagle cried out]. (19b-25a)

Here, as elsewhere in the poem, the narrator emphasizes that the deprivations of exile are in many ways preferable to the earthly joys of the hall. In *The Wanderer*, the nostalgia for lost companions is much more deeply felt. After awakening from a dream in which he remember the joys of the hall, the exile sees not his companions, but only "baðian brimfulgas, brædan feþra" [bathing seagulls, spreading feathers] (47). This vision prompts him into further despair:

Sorg bið geniwad
þonne maga gemynd mod geondheworfeð:
greteð gliwstafum, georne geondsceawað –
secga geseldan swimmað eft onweg,
fleotendra ferð no þær fela bringeð
cuðra cwidegiedda

[Sorrow is renewed when spirit mindful of kinsmen, turns around, greets with marks of joy, eagerly looks around – the companions of men swim away again, the floating troop brings no familiar utterances] (50b-55a).

This passage has been variously interpreted: do the "secga geseldan" refer to the vision of the exile's lost companions, fading from memory, or do they refer back to the

"baðian brimfulgas" of a few lines before?[64] I believe it is reasonable to interpret this more or less literally: still in a haze of sleep and depression, he sees his departed companions in the flock of seagulls bathing in the surf. When he turns to them, they fly away. As with the passage from *The Seafarer*, the sounds of birds is contrasted with the sounds of people. The birds/departed friends are referred to as "secga," a chiefly poetic term for a man that is related to "secgan" [to speak].[65] The irony of this usage is emphasized by the complaint that the troop "brings no familiar utterances." Since the narrator complains earlier that "nis nu cwicra nan þe ic him modsefan mine durre sweotule asecgan" [There is not now alive any to whom I dare speak clearly about my state of mind] (9b-11a), it is clear that the community he is cut off from is defined just as much in discursive as in social terms. The birds and their speechlessness seem to mock his isolation from the familiar discourse of the hall its society. The imagery of birds and their contrast with the voices of humans in these two passages emphasizes the exiles' separation from that community.

The imagery of an exile alone in the wilderness complements the rhetoric of exile, emphasizing the separation of the deject wanderer from the comforts and companionship of the hall, as discussed above. The hall represents humans' efforts to exert some control over nature, to wall it away and create a space free from its forces. But in the context of the natural world, the world of the hall is just as transient as a human life. While it may endure for longer than the span of a human life, it is subject to

[64] For a summary of various interpretations, see Klinck, "Old English Elegies," 116-7.
[65] See Clark, Hall, and Merrit, *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.

the same forces. This idea finds its focus in the image of the ruined building, beset by the depredations of nature.

The trope of the ruin can be seen in *The Wanderer* when the speaker invites the audience to contemplate with fear the decayed state of the world:

> Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle hu gæstlic bið
> þonne ealle þisse worulde wela weste stondeð,
> swa nu missenlice geond þisne middangeard
> winde biwaune weallas stondaþ, hrime bihrorene.
> [The keen warrior shall perceive how spiritual it will be when all this world's wealth stands desolate, as now here and there around this middle-earth blown upon by wind stand walls, covered by frost]. (73-77a)

It is tempting to translate "gæstlic" in line 73 with its Modern English descendant "ghastly;" however, as Klinck points out, the old English word most frequently carries the sense of "non-corporeal," although other editors have suggested "mysterious," "awesome," or "terrible" as glosses.[66] Whatever the specific sense of the word, the overall mood of terror and dread in the passage is clear, as the narrator contemplates a world reduced to weather-beaten ruins. Later in the poem, a ruin evokes the memory of fallen warriors:

> Stondeð nu on laste leofre duguþe
> weal wundrum heah, wyrmlicum fah.
> Eorlas fornoman asca þryþe,

[66] Klinck, *The Old English Elegies*, 121.

wæpen wælgifru, wyrd seo mære.

[There stands now in the track of the beloved troop a wall wondrously high, decorated with serpentine patterns. Noblemen were taken away by spears' might, weapons greedy for slaughter, fate the glorious] (97-100).

As with the *ubi sunt* topos, the imagery of ruined buildings expresses an ambivalent relationship with the past. The ruin serves at once as a site for praising the glories of the past and a site for contemplating that past as irrecoverably gone. Furthermore, the imagery of ruination frequently emphasizes the forces that now act upon it: the site, once a part of human society, now belongs to the realm of the hostile, destructive natural world.

This ambivalent contemplation of ancient ruins and the forces of nature that act upon them receives its fullest contemplation in *The Ruin*. This poem, found in the back folios of the manuscript, those most affected by the burn damage discussed previously. As such, some portions of the poem are damaged beyond reconstruction. What remains of the text, though, is very clear. The poem begins with an evocative description of a ruined city:

Wrætlic is þes wealstan! Wyrde gebræcon;

burgstede burston, brosnað enta geweorc;

hrofas sind gehrorene, hreorge torras,

hrungeat[67] berofen, hrim on lime;

scearde scurbeorge, scorene, gedrorene,

[67] The MS reads "hrim geat torras," which is emended by Krapp and Dobbie to "hrungeat" [barred gate]. However, Klinck prefers the reading "hringeat." See Krapp and Dobbie, 364-5 and Klinck, 209.

ældo underreotone."

[Wonderful is this wall-foundation! Fates broke it; the fortified places broke apart, the work of giants decays the roof is fallen, towers collapsing, the barred (or arched) gate missing, frost on the mortar; mutilated storm-protections, cut down, fallen, eaten away by age]. (1-6)

The poem proceeds to contemplate the way the city had once been, how the walls had stood "rice æfter oþrum, / ofstonden under stormum." [one kingdom after another, enduring under storms]. (10-11). As the description continues, alternating between the glories of the past and the ruin of the present, the narrator considers the people that had dwelt in the city that once was, wondering at their ingenuity and skill that crafted the stone arches and imagining "heresweg micel, / meodoheall monig, mondreama full" [the sound of many battle companies, many mead halls, full of man-joys]. But these imagined joys were not to last:

Crungon walo wide; cwoman woldagas.

Swylt eall fronom secgrofra wera.

Wurdon hyra wigsteal wesenstaþalos.

Brosnade burgsteall, betend crungon,

hergas to hrusan.

[Widely fell the battle-slain; days of pestilence came. Death took all away the brave sword men. The battlements became wastelands. The city's foundation crumbled, the repairer fell in battle, armies to earth]. (25-9)

As the narrator traces the decline of the city into ruin, the former inhabitants' achievements in treasure and in skill are kept in view, as the poem praises the wonder of their silver and jewels and the convenience of cunningly crafted hot baths. The final readable words exclaim "þæt is cynelic þing / hu se…burg" [that is a splendid thing how the … city…]

For some time, scholars have recognized the likely possibility that this poem describes an actual location: the Roman ruins of Bath, England. Several details in the poem point to this location, such as the description of its stone arches, but the clearest clue is the reference to natural hot spring-fed baths, particularly the "hringmere hate" [hot ring-pool] described at the end of the poem. Of course, the poem does much more than describe a single identifiable site: the poem is a study in contrasts between the glories of the past and the desolation of the future. Like Bede's exemplum of the bird in the hall, it calls on us to consider the fleeting comfort of human life compared to the scope of the threatening unknown, and the limited protection provided by human works against the irresistible forces of nature.

Vital to the poem's examination of humans' transient lives is its contemplation of life in the hall: In addition to the direct reference to "meodoheall monig" [many mead-halls], the poem points to the accumulation of treasure, to the gathering of battle companies, and to the joys of companionship in the hall. As discussed previously, the imagery of the hall and its associated practices are an important focus of many Old English poems. By imagining the one-time citizens of the present-day ruin as hall-dwellers, the poem attempts to reconcile past and present through the lens of nostalgia.

As with depictions of hall-life in other poems, this is in many ways an ambivalent depiction: once they lived thus, but now their city is ruined. It is tempting to read the description of the ruins here as condemnation, as a rhetorical evocation of the terror and destruction that awaits the sinful. This is a common trope in religious rhetoric. Anglo-Saxon churchmen – such as those who compiled the *Exeter Book* – would have been familiar with Old Testament passages such as Jeremiah 9:11: "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals; and I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there." Such descriptions are not uncommon in Anglo-Saxon religious writings. For example, Blickling Homily VI recounts the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Emperor Titus, which the homilist links to the Jews' participation in the crucifixion. After waiting forty years for them to repent, God allowed Rome to destroy the city and its people: "Ond þæt eal for Godes wræca fordyde ond þæt land gesetton, swa hie sylfe wolden" [On account of the vengeance of God he brought all to ruin and disposed of the land, as they (the Romans) desired]. (201-2). Here, the imagery of ruination serves an explicitly rhetorical purpose, emphasizing the ruin as a sign of God's wrath. However, this text lacks that kind of direct moralizing or homiletic elements. The people that built and lived within the ruin are portrayed as expert craftsmen, proud warriors, rich in joys and in treasures: perhaps proud, perhaps foolish for believing their easy living would last, but certainly not deserving of their fate.[68]

[68] James Doubleday, in "*The Ruin*: Structure and Theme." *JEGP* 71 (1972), suggests that the poem is condemnatory. Citing the influence of Saint Augustine on Anglo-Saxon thought, he connects the rhetoric of *The Ruin* to Augustine's "opposition between the city of God, or the mystical community of all believers, and the city of man, or the whole group of those who, loving themselves rather than God, are

This humanization – and perhaps Germanicization – of the lost citizens contrasts with the opening of the poem, which refers to the city as "enta geweorc" [the work of giants], an expression that elsewhere refers to ancient, unknown architects of forgotten relics, as in *The Wanderer*: "Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda scyppend, / oþþæt burgwara breahtma lease / eald enta geweorc idlu stodon." [The Creator of men thus laid waste the world, until city-dwellers noiseless as old works of giants stood empty] (85-87).[69] Ascription of the works of the past to giants is more than a fanciful metaphor; giants play a number of diverse roles Old English poetry. According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, the imagery of the giant in Anglo-Saxon texts is a rhetorical trope that evokes powerful myths, "from how the world was formed and where linguistic difference originates to why stone ruins dot the British countryside, and what comprises heroic male identity."[70] Giants are representatives of excess –they are too big, too powerful, too uncouth – but they are also gone from this earth, perhaps because of these excesses. I believe that the reference to giants at the opening of the poem is designed to emphasize the pastness of the past through the present day sign of the ruin.

In the rhetoric of the elegies, this present-day sign is used as a reminder of the hostility of natural forces, and it is frequently described in terms of the antagonism of these forces. Often, the ruined state of buildings is described through emphasis on their

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deservedly damned." Doubleday sees this at work in lines 35-37 of *The Ruin*, where the typical citizen is said to look on various treasures and glories of the city.

[69] According to the Dictionary of Old English Corpus, the phrase also occurs in *Andreas* 1492, *Beowulf* 2715 and 2773, and *Maxims II* 1. The similar phrase "giganta geweorc" occurs in *Beowulf* 1557. For the possible distinction between "enta" and "giganta," see Cohen, 3.

[70] Jeffery Jerome Cohen, "Old English Literature and the Works of Giants," *Comitatus* 24 (1993) : 1, http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5jt8f7dd (accessed June 27, 2011).

exposure to the elements, as in *The Wanderer* when ruined masonry is described "winde biwaune" [blown upon by winds] (76a) or later in the text when he describes the state of the world:

> Ond þas stanhleoþu stormas cnyssað;
> hrið hreosende hrusan bindeð,
> wintres woma, þonne won cymeð,
> nipeð nihtscua, norðan onsendeð
> hreo hælfare hæleþum on andan
> [And thus stone walls are afflicted by storms, snowstorms fall on frozen ground in winter's tumult, when men come, the night shadow grows dark, from the north against the hero is sent a troubled hailstorm in hostility]. (101-5)[71]

The buildings described in *The Wanderer* cannot provide even the temporary protection from the storm offered to Bede's bird by the hall. The storm will continue until the warmth and light of the hall go out, and there is no longer any distinction between inside and outside.

The forces of nature are not so much evil as they are inevitable: no matter how great the structure, the rhetoric of the elegies suggests that all will eventually erode, as in *The Ruin*. As discussed above, the description of the stone ruins provides rhetorical focus on the transience of the things of the world. The decay is put in terms of natural forces: -- frost, lichen, storms, and the grip of the earth. The poem makes a point of

[71] A similar depiction of winter weather is found in *The Seafarer* immediately before the narrator announces his intention to set out to sea again: "Nap nihtscua, norþan sniwde, / hrim hrusan bond, hægl feol on eorþan, / corna caldast" [Night's shadow grew dark, snow from the north, frost bound the ground, hail fell on earth, the coldest of corn] (31-3a).

describing the "scearde scurbeorge" [gashed storm-covering] (5). This could refer to protections against either literal showers or showers of spears and arrows[72]; a double meaning seems appropriate here since both weather and warfare ("crungon walo wide" [widely fell the battle-slain] (25a)) are portrayed as equally destructive forces. The coverings have now failed, remaining only as a reminder of the storms that could not be withstood. Moreover, the fate of the buildings reflects the fate of the builders: "Eorðgrap hafað / waldendwyrhtan, forweorone, geleorene, / heard gripe hrusan" [Earth's grip holds the mighty builder, decayed, passed away in the hard grip of the earth] (6b-7a). Descriptions of the forces that work on the ruin emphasize the fearfulness of the world and humankind's place within it. As Neville points out, "The natural world strikes out, binds, sends missiles; the human race does not act in response but merely is, and not for long either."[73] Descriptions of the natural world add fearful intensity to the rhetoric of transience and eternity of the Old English elegies.

However, *The Ruin* also suggests a positive narrative in the struggle of man against nature. Temporary though it may be, the ancient builders have achieved some victory against the earth. As discussed above, the rhetoric of *The Ruin* alternates between amazement at the destructive power of nature to amazement at the creative power of the builders. Lines 9b-20 seem to indicate the beginning of the first turn of thought, although the manuscript page is far too damaged to assuredly interpret the passage. Klinck prints the lines as follows:

Oft þæs wag gebad,

[72] Klinck, *Old English Elegies*, 209
[73] Neville, *Representations*, 49.

ræghar ond readfah, rice æfter oþrum,

oftstonden under stormum. Stea[p], geap gedreas,

Wu[n]að giet s[e]--------- ------[n]um geheapen.

Fela [i]---------- ----------[e]

grimme gegrunde[n] ----------

----------r[e] scan heo----------

----------g orþonc ærsceaft --------

----------g-- lamrindum beag.

Mog mo[nade m]yneswiftne gebrægd;

hwætred in hringas hygerof gebond

weall walanwirum wundrum togædre.

[Often that wall endured, lichen-covered and mottled with red coloring, one kingdom after another, enduring under storms. The high curves decline, remains yet the… piled high. Persisted … grim ground … shone the … ingenious ancient work … clay coating bent. The heart prompted the keen-minded to clever ideas; with wondrous arts the stout-hearted bound the wall in strips of metal wondrously together].

Before the damaged portion, the wall is viewed as something that has survived in spite of the effects of nature. Just as the forces of nature endure beyond the extent of single human lives and kingdoms, so has the wall, which is itself fashioned from the earth. The mastery over the natural world is even more clearly expressed at the end of the poem, which is similarly mutilated. A few lines, however, are clear:

Stanhofu stodan; stream hate wearp,

widan wylme. Weal eall befeng

beorhtan bosme, þær þa baþu wæron,

hat on hreþre. Þæt wæs hyðelic.

[Stone dwellings stood; hot streams rose up widely surging. The wall all encompassed the bright bosom where the baths were, hot in the breast. That was a convenient thing]. (37-41).

It is this passage that most clearly suggests that the poem describes an actual site, specifically the ruins of the thermal pools at Roman Bath. According to Roy Leslie, in addition to being attested by the city's name, descriptions of the hot springs there are attested in charters and in the *Memorials of St. Dunstan*, which "refers to Bath as a place where hot springs burst forth from their hiding place in the abyss in steaming droplets."[74] What the text praises in the last few lines – from what can be reconstructed -- is human mastery of natural forces:

Leton þonne geotan [l]----------

ofer h[arn]e stan hate streamas,

un[d]---------- ----------

[o]þþæt hringmere hate----------

---------- þær þa baþu wæron.

Þonne is----------

----------re þæt is cynelic þing

[74] Roy Leslie, *Three Old English Elegies*, 22-3.

hu se ---------- -------burg ------

[Let then gush … over grey stone hot streams, under(?) … until hot ring-pool … where the baths were. Then is … that is a splendid thing how the … city…]

Although much is missing from this description, the poem appears to marvel at the ingenuity that directed the hot, streaming water into circular pools. On the other hand, the victory over nature here described is out of the past, "enta geweorc," presumably lost to the people of the present. While the rhetoric appears to glory in the wonders of the past, the voice of the poem is resolutely in the present, dwelling on the remnants of what once was. The rhetorical voice of *The Ruin*, as it is through most of the elegies, may find temporary solace and warmth in the mead-hall of the past, but it ultimately originates from the stormy present day of transience, fear, and uncertainty.

Which brings our flight path once more into King Edwin's hall. If Edwin's counselors are to be believed, we have no need to fear the storm outside of the hall. Though the journey may be brief, though storms may threaten, another, even greater hall awaits us in the afterlife. The idea of a storm ravaged hall, open on either end, would then belong only to the pagan worldview. In the resolutely Christian textual space of the Exeter Book, one would expect the more positive view to dominate. This seems to be the intended message of the homiletic statements at the end of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, in which eternal life is offered as an answer to the transience of earthly things. Even the state of exile, the condition of many of these poems' narrators, may not be wholly negative. But poems such as *The Ruin* suggest otherwise. Whatever consolation may be offered by Christian rhetoric cannot compete

with the overwhelming forces represented by the natural world. Humans may hope to escape exposure for a brief time buy building up battlements, by bending nature to their own needs, but nature cannot be held off forever. All great works will fade. Perhaps the sparrow will fly on to a better place, but for now, he must contend with the rain and hail.

5.6 Conclusion: The Sum of All Fears

This project, in which I examine the role of fear in Old English texts across a variety of genres and contexts, grew out of a more general set of interests in Anglo-Saxon literature and rhetoric. As I wrap up my discussion, I want to highlight how I view this work in relation to larger questions about Anglo-Saxon studies and rhetoric in contemporary discourse. First of all, what role does Anglo-Saxon studies have to play in the contemporary critical discourse? The study of Old English literature has often been stereotyped as un-egaged with contemporary critical theory, preferring instead the methodologies of philology, source study, and formalist criticism. But the past twenty years or so have seen a steady output of critical work that attempts to broaden this spectrum, such as Frantzen's *Desire for Origins*, Lees's *Tradition and Belief*, Pasternack's *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, and Drout's *How Tradition Works*, to name just a small sampling. My work in this project also seeks to engage with discourse such as poststructuralism, ideology criticism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and other contemporary critical discourses. My goal in this has been, in part, to open up new venues of conversation about the Anglo-Saxons and their literature.

Rhetoric, I believe, plays an important role in these conversations. Many critics have studied the role of rhetoric in Anglo-Saxon literature, but most of these studies have focused on the knowledge and use of rhetorical figures from the classical era as employed by the Anglo-Saxons. I do not discount the importance of this pursuit, but it cannot be the end of the story. Virtually all areas of post-conversion Anglo-Saxon culture show the influence of Classical and Late-Antique traditions, but these traditions are filtered through the traditions brought over from the continent during the migration. Nowhere is this truer than in texts with some rhetorical purposes: as I argue throughout this work, Anglo-Saxon texts are innovative in their blending of traditions to the end of specific rhetorical appeals. But as with any blending of traditions, the marriage is not always an easy one: the attempts to combine appeals to multiple traditions often draws attention to conflicts, contradictions, paradoxes, and anxieties, even as it attempts to resolve these. Contemporary critical discourse is drawn toward such ruptures and is well suited to analyze the ways in which Anglo-Saxon rhetoric attempts to deal with the multiple traditions from which it originates.

As I explore in Chapter 2, the rhetoric of fear is seen clearly in Ælfric and Wulfstan's eschatological statements in their sermons, particularly those addressed to lay audiences, such as Ælfric's *Sermo ad Populum* and Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. As I suggest, these sermons appeal to the fear of tribulations in the present and in the future, and they rely on a set of sometimes contradictory assumptions and expectations. Ælfric and Wulfstan, relying on the authority and antiquity of Christian doctrine, conflate complex ideas about punishment, atonement, and the end times. In

order to understand the function of this rhetoric, I argue, it is important to understand the ideological articulations Ælfric and Wulfstan expect their audience to make. I would further argue that, in much the same way, people who wish to challenge and engage with apocalyptic rhetoric must first understand the ideologic – to use Crowley's term – on which this rhetoric depends.

In Chapter 3, I explore the rhetoric of fear used in the vernacular poetic saints' lives *Andreas* and *Elene*. Fear and saintliness go hand in hand, since the most popular saints' legends frequently involve extended and vivid descriptions of torture and torment. In the two texts I examine, fear is also used to differentiate between the blessed and the damned. Fearfulness and abjection characterize the damned while fearlessness and transcendence characterize the blessed. But these dividing lines are rife with striking contradictions: in *Andreas*, the enemies of the saint are abject monsters, but it is the saint who is truly the deject wanderer, and his destructive power is ultimately greater than that of the Mermedonians. In *Elene*, the saint actually takes on the role of tormentor, forcing the audience to sympathize against her victim. Both of these texts base their inspiring message on harsh dividing lines, and it is important that readers challenge the foundations of these lines and not duplicate them in their own readings.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the world of riddles, a world that is at once hilarious and terrifying. The Old English riddles of the Exeter Book turn everyday objects upside down and inside out, and do the same to language itself. In my reading of several riddles that deal with writing and language, I examine how these riddles engage with anxieties about the spoken and written word. Although some of the riddles explore the

idea of written language with a degree of fascination, others address the subject with the language of nostalgia, loss, and fear. While acknowledging the communicative power of language, particularly language that can be recorded and stored in manuscripts, they express powerful anxieties about this. Language removed from its speaker can be misused, misunderstood, lost, or destroyed.

Chapter 5 continues an exploration of the idea of loss, focusing on the so-called Elegies of the Exeter Book. In these well-known poems, the rhetoric of fear is expressed in themes that contrast transience with eternity, exile with community, and human life with the natural world. Using powerful, moving imagery of wandering exiles, ruined cities, and powerful forces of nature, the these lyrics invites the audience to contemplate the transience of their world and to think about the world to come. But the rhetoric of these texts is deeply ambivalent: offering the solace of eternity as a consolation, it draws the audience's attention toward the transience of the mortal world. In trying to devalue the things of the transient earth, the poems rely on nostalgia for those very things we must put away to reach the next life. The poems offer no easy answer to such contradictions, and, I believe, dwell on these contradictions as part of an overall rhetoric of fear and loss.

The idea of a rhetoric that arrises from an amalgam of traditions, that attempts – not always successfully – to deal with internal contradiction, the idea of a rhetoric that make a particular appeals to fear – these are, it would seem, ideas relevant to our own time as much as they are to the early Middle Ages, perhaps even more so. As I allude to in chapter two, there can be little doubt that contemporary rhetoric often appeals to fear:

in particular, the fear that our world – or at least, the world as we know it – is coming to an end. It would be easy to dismiss such rhetoric as simple manipulation of the ignorant, playing on irrational fears. But irrational or not, these are fears that are deeply felt by many audiences. Such fears cannot be assuaged by simply explaining the facts as a matter of rational, reasonable discourse. It is not my intention to draw a direct comparison between Anglo-Saxon and contemporary rhetoric, but I believe that we in the present have much to learn from the past. We are often better at expressing our fears than understanding them, and often better at feeling our own fears than understanding those felt by others. Examining the ways in which Anglo-Saxons expressed, felt, and understood their own fears may help us to engage more fully with our own fears as they are expressed, felt, and understood. The rhetoric of fear need not be the destroyer of our souls nor of our minds.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Thomas Austin Tutt has studied and taught at the University of Texas at Arlington since 2003. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Music with a minor in English from Texas Wesleyan University in 2003 and his Masters in English from UTA in 2005. He has presented and chaired panels at academic conferences across the country. His primary academic interests include Old and Middle English, critical theory, rhetoric, and the use of technology in the English classroom.